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by
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(CARL E. MANDEL)
President, CARLTON MILLS, INC.

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VOLUME 215

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111 Rue Réaumur

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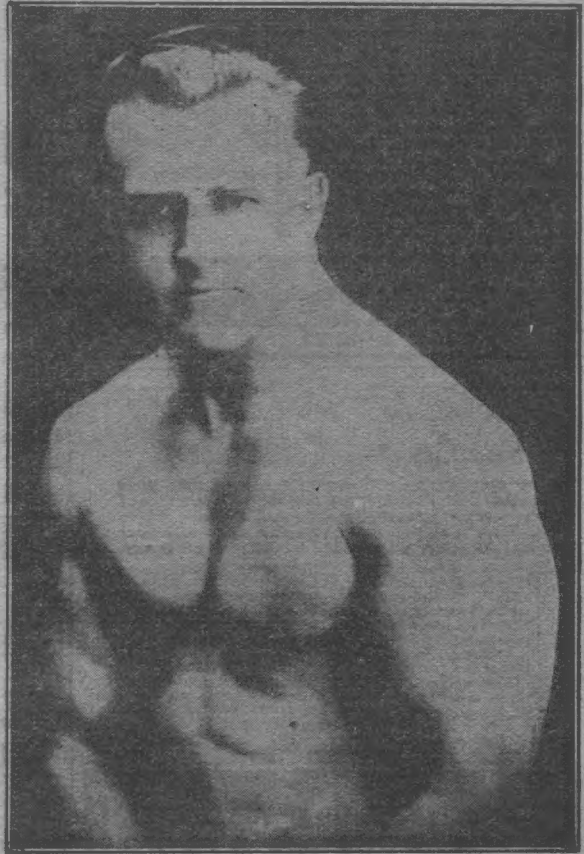
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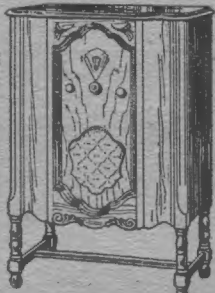
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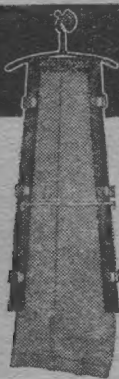
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ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

VOLUME 215

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 1930

NUMBER 3



A misty yellow Buddha seemed to be reaching for Barry

Forbidden Seas

*Little did David Barry dream how his uncanny marksmanship
would fling him into a piratical expedition*

By R. DE S. HORN

Author of "Island of the Damned," "The Golden Traitor," etc.

CHAPTER I.

MARKSMANSHIP.

WITH Barry's last shot a patter of applause ran around the group of bystanders. Twelve shots, almost like a bunch of firecrackers going off together—and twelve

nubbins of pipe stems were all that remained above the board where there had been whole clay pipes!

"Man, that's shooting!"

The speaker thrust forward in the crowd as he spoke. He was a stocky little man with grizzled hair and weatherbeaten face, but his eyes were

as bright as a boy's. He was short enough, but he looked even shorter by comparison with the gigantic Chinaman who was looking over his shoulder.

Now the giant Chinaman cackled his admiring sentiments also. "Golly! 'Melican man shoot plenty good!"

The proprietor of the shooting gallery was quick to grasp such good advertising.

"He's right, gents—that's shootin'! And just to make it interesting I'll offer a prize right now of five dollars cash to anybody here who can beat the gentleman shooting! Five dollars, gentlemen, right on the boards! Anybody here who can shoot well enough to win five dollars?"

There was a moment's silence. Then the stocky grizzled man reached for one of the loaded rifles extended temptingly toward him. He hefted the .22 caliber gun, inspected it disparagingly.

"Ain't much used to these little guns, but—"

Crack-crack-crack — the little clay pipes leaped into the air, one after another, until the last one. At the last shot the stocky marksman gave a grunt of disgust. "Damn! Missed that last un clean. Must 'a' slid off just as I pulled trigger."

Barry grinned. "You can't expect accurate shooting from these little old worn-out gallery rifles. If you had used a heavier, more accurate rifle—"

"Hey—I got one right here, if that's what you're asking for!" The gallery man, obviously indignant at the slight to his equipment, reached under the counter and brought forth a heavier, bigger rifle.

"There, see if you c'n find anything wrong with that un. I don't let nobody but experts use it; but I reckon

she's safe with you two gents." He thrust the gun into Barry's hands. "Want to shoot at still or moving targets?"

"Moving," accepted the stocky stranger before Barry could answer. "What sort of moving targets you got?"

"I got one that'll skin your eyes," snorted the gallery man. "Maybe you can kill pipes sitting, but let's see how many you can get on the wing!" He turned and let out a bawl toward the rear of the gallery. "Gus! Give them Dutchmen a swing!"

FROM some side cubbyhole appeared a cadaverous youth who tinkered for a moment at the fastenings of the pipe board, then stepped back and gave it a swing. The board, pipes and all, oscillated jerkily as the attendant popped back out of sight.

Barry studied the swaying pipes for a careful moment. Then he tried the heft of the new rifle, the trigger pull, and swung it to his shoulder. "This isn't going to be so easy—"

Crack-crack — crack-crack—crack! The reports this time were not so rapid nor so evenly spaced; Barry was firing mostly at the end of the swings. But when the magazine was empty, again a row of clay nubbins appeared—one nubbin for each shot fired.

Spectators jabbered amazedly, but the stocky little man only grunted. The huge Chinaman in the background, however, cackled again. "No can beat that shootee!"

For answer the grizzled rifleman threw butt to shoulder, nestled his chin to the walnut, and pulled trigger.

But when the last bullet had been fired, there were two more clay pipes left standing than there should have been.

The grizzled stocky man laid down the rifle and held out his hand to Barry. "You beat me—but I was whipped before I started."

Barry accepted the hand cheerfully. "You'd probably have beaten me to smithereens if you'd been in practice."

"Yep—all it takes is practice!" The gallery man pounced on the word with true showman psychology. "Practice, gents—all it takes is practice! Any man here can become a crack shot with just a little practice! Twelve shots for a quarter—two bits—only twenty-five cents. Who'll be the first—"

Barry found himself a little later beside the stocky man who had competed with him.

"Knows his business, that ballyhoo man," said the stocky man approvingly. "By the way, can you shoot like that at longer ranges, out in the open? Have you done much shooting?"

"A little—off and on," said Barry. "I used to shoot on a team we had at school. And, by the way, my name is Barry. David Barry."

"Mine's Waters. Glad to know you."

Barry found himself walking along beside the other as they strolled carelessly back toward the center of town. "You must do quite a bit of shooting yourself, Mr. Waters."

The stocky man shrugged his shoulders. "Did quite a bit, one time. Not much lately, though. Did quite a bit of big game shooting years ago—up in Alaska. Going up there again before long. Say, you wouldn't care to come along, too, would you? We've room for one more good man—and I'll guarantee the shooting."

But Barry shook his head. "Can't. I'd like to. But I'm only here for a couple of days—got to get back to my ship then."

"Ship!" The stocky man looked at him keenly. "Sailor, eh? Deep-water man?"

Barry grinned apologetically. "'Fraid not, Mr. Waters. I've sailed small boats a little, but only for fun. I'm what you'd call a steamboat man, I expect. And, by the way, oughtn't I call you Captain Waters? There's something about your face that looks sea-going, somehow."

The stocky man gave a grunt. "You're sharp-eyed, all right. I've had ships of my own—though that was a long time ago. Sure you can't come along with us, shooting?"

"'Fraid not, captain. Thanks, just the same."

The stocky man shook his head regretfully. "I'm sorry; I'd liked to have had you along. I believe we could show you something in the way of hunting you never saw before. But—oh, well—come on up to the room with me, anyway, and have a drink. I've got a gun or two—special jobs—that I believe you'd be interested in. That is, if you like guns."

AS if taking Barry's acceptance for granted, he turned off into a side street. A few minutes later he led the way into a little unpretentious hotel—the sort of place, Barry judged, where sailors and miners might put up when they came to town.

Waters's room was on the third floor at the back. Apparently the stocky man was stopping there only a few days; there was a single suitcase on a chair in the corner, a couple of unopened packages thrown carelessly on the bed. But what caught Barry's eye immediately were two leather gun cases.

The stocky man picked up the nearest gun case. "You like guns; see how you like this one."

Barry could not repress an exclamation of admiration as he took the proffered rifle. The gun was absolutely without ornamentation, and the butt was of plainest walnut. But the weight of the barrel, the cleanliness of the breech mechanism, the delicate balance, the perfection of the sights—these were the points the gun-lover in Barry noted. When he put it down, it was almost with a sigh.

"Man, that's a gun!" was all he said. But all the words in the world could not have told more.

Waters smiled pleasedly. "This is my own pet gun. But there's another just like it in that other case there that you can use if you say the word. Better change your mind; let your boat sail without you for a trip and come along with me."

Barry shook his head. "I'd like to, one hell of a lot. But it can't be done."

"All right—I'll believe you this time." The stocky man put up the gun. Then he rummaged in the suitcase and took out a dozen or so pictures—ordinary snapshots. "Take a look over these—maybe they'll interest you, too. And while you're doing it, I'll slip down and get us something to drink. They've got good beer here."

He disappeared through the door, closing it behind him.

Barry took up the snapshots and looked at them with interest.

There was no doubt that the stocky man was a hunter; every conceivable sort of big game of the North was represented in the pictures. Grizzly—caribou—moose; even a snow-white polar bear lying dead on the ice, with the stocky figure of Waters in furs and boots standing beside it.

The door opened, and Waters reappeared; he carried a tray with four bottles of beer on it, and two glasses.

Going over to the wash-bowl, he uncapped two of the bottles, poured them deftly out into the glasses and held one out to Barry.

"To our hunting trip—some other time, if not this time!" he toasted cheerfully.

It was strong beer—stronger and bitterer than any Barry had ever drunk. But it was good, too—a solid, sturdy beer that carried strength in its brown body.

After that they talked of guns and hunting, and of the host's pictures. Finally Barry looked at his watch regretfully. "I'm afraid I'll have to be going shortly. I didn't have any idea it was so late."

"Have another before you go," protested Waters, opening the other two bottles.

Again Barry drank, the same bitter heady brew. It made him cough and clear his throat. He wondered if perhaps he hadn't made a mistake, taking this second one. His head was feeling queer; the wall and ceiling seemed strangely unsteady. Only it was ridiculous to think two glasses of beer could affect a man.

A minute or two later, however, he could no longer deceive himself. Things actually began to whirl around.

He stood up, caught at the bed to steady himself. He tried to apologize embarrassedly. "I'm sorry—that beer got to me—somehow," he mumbled. "Foolish—never had it happen—before—"

The stocky man's face was almost a blur—it seemed endowed with astounding characteristics; one moment it receded into infinity, and the next it rushed forward, gigantically close. To Barry the mouth seemed to be half grinning; there was a queer triumphant gleam in those staring eyes.

A sudden incredible suspicion seized upon Barry.

"That beer! You—you doped it!" he cried out wildly. "You put—something—in my glass!" He stood up, tried to make for the door. "Out—let me—out!"

But he could not get out because of the stocky man standing in front of him, blocking the way. The stocky man had grown suddenly twice as tall; he was a giant, now—he was no longer white, he was yellow! He was standing in the door, as yellow as a gilt Buddha! He was coming closer now; he was reaching for Barry—Barry could see the huge yellow hand, as big as a ham, almost under his very nose!

"Help!" he cried, with his last strength.

And then the blur everywhere deepened into a roaring mist and swallowed everything. As through a million miles of space he heard a voice, strangely like the stocky man's, only infinitely tinier, saying: "Catch him, Sing Shu! Quick—there he goes!"

Then all sight and sound disappeared in the roaring mist.

CHAPTER II.

SHANGHAIED!

BARRY awoke with a ringing in his head, a terrible feeling of nausea, a sensation as if the whole world were rocking and reeling. The ceiling overhead seemed to be pushing almost into his very face; the shadowy corners seemed to be swinging in slow uneven arcs. He shut his eyes again.

Gradually the dizziness, like the blur before his eyes, passed. But the swinging, lurching feeling remained. Gradually he realized that it was real—just like that close overhanging ceiling

almost within reach. At the same time there came to him noises above; shouts, a creak as of straining timbers, the thud of hurrying feet.

There was no doubt of it. He was on a ship. This bed he lay on was a bunk, the ceiling close overhead was the bottom of another bunk. The swing and lurch was the motion of a ship.

With a little cry of returning memory he tried to sit up. "That drink—that stocky man Waters!"

Somewhere close by a voice cackled, amused but friendly. "You askee fo' Cap'n Dan'l? He no come—he busy on deck. 'Melican man be still; he feel mo' bettel in minute."

Barry twisted his head to look.

Close beside him was a huge Chinaman. He wore the rough clothes of a sailor, but there was something about his grin that struck a chord in Barry's memory.

"I know you!" muttered Barry. "At the shooting gallery—and then in that room!"

The Chinaman cackled again. "Yes. Now all samee on Aulola—Cap'n Dan'l's boat. You likee huntin' tip, Misteh Bally?"

"Hunting?"

"Yes. Cap'n Dan'l, he say you all samee new huntel."

To Barry's dazed brain came filtering back further recollections: the stocky man's rifles, the pictures, the invitation to a hunting trip. But it was preposterous that one man should shanghai another merely to have him as companion on a hunting trip.

He suddenly threw his legs over the side of the bunk. "Somebody's crazy—stark, staring crazy! This is no joke—I've got a ship and a job to get back to. Where is this boss of yours—this Captain Waters?"

The Chinaman made no reply; but

also he made no effort to stop Barry as the latter got to his feet with a groan, and started for a little ladder that led steeply upward just outside the door.

It was a companionway, evidently to the poop. Barry climbed it slowly, pushed open the hatch slide and scrambled out on deck.

He found himself on the poop of a schooner heeling over under full canvas and the thrust of a strong breeze. At the wheel stood a bareheaded sailor, giving her a spoke up or down as the ship yawed with the surges. Beside the helmsman stood the stocky Captain Waters, every inch a seaman now in old trousers, jacket and boots, and looking forward interestedly to a group of men clustered near the foremast. From that group came loud voices, quarreling, arguing.

But the stocky schooner captain had glimpsed Barry. He nodded cheerfully. "Hello. I was just wondering when you'd show up."

There was no friendliness in Barry's answer. "This may be your idea of a joke," he snapped angrily, "but it's not mine. You've got to let me ashore right now!"

For a long moment the schooner man looked at Barry; his lips twitched, there seemed to be a gleam of lurking amusement deep in his eyes. But he merely shrugged his shoulders. "If that's the way you feel about it, I suppose there'll be no stopping you. So go ahead ashore—whenever you like." He waved a hand carelessly astern.

LOOKING about, Barry gaped amazedly. Instead of the city's buildings, shore line, there was only water—and, far on either beam, the low blur of land already vanishing in the rising mists.

"Too late for the Aurora to turn back now, I'm afraid," said the stocky man calmly. "And really I'm quite anxious to have you on this particular hunting trip, Mr. Barry; I need a man who can shoot as you can."

At that Barry's pent-up wrath exploded completely. "Hunting? Damn it, are you crazy? Don't you think I have anything to do but spend the summer hunting with you? Why if I'm not back aboard my ship by dark, I'm likely to—"

He got no further. The stocky captain, who had been gazing forward again, suddenly gave a grunt, an oath, and stepped past Barry as if that individual did not even exist. At the same time Barry, turning, glimpsed a sudden commotion in the little group by the foremast. Arms flashed, feet kicked; shouts and curses rose on the air. Then from out the group burst a man, face all streaming with blood, racing aft as if the very devil was at his heels.

"Help! Help!" he cried as he ran. "He's murderin' me! Name o' Gawd, he's murderin' me!"

He had reached the tiny poop ladder, was about to scramble up, when the stocky schooner captain stepped forward, barred the way. "Here, here!" the stocky captain called out. "What's this foolishness? Mister Tagle! Mister Tagle! Come here!"

From out the group forward stepped as extraordinary an individual as Barry had ever seen.

He was fully a foot taller than the average man, with a chest like a barrel and with arms and legs as thick as posts. His boots were enormous and the hands at the ends of his arms were like pudgy hams. His short neck and low forehead and small eyes gave Barry the impression of a human go-

rilla, and the bristly stubble beard of his unshaven jowls added to the suggestion. From his swaggering tread as he came aft Barry deduced that here was the Aurora's mate.

Captain Waters's interrogation confirmed the fact. "Mister Tagle, what's the matter here? What's the trouble with this man?"

The mate looked at the cowering sailor and scowled. "Mutiny, capt'n. Th' damn' whelp said he wasn't goin' to do a lick o' work aboard the Aurora, an' was goin' to jump ship first place we touched. I hit him to shut his mouth."

The Aurora's captain turned grimly to the cowering sailor. "You refused to work? You said you'd desert—"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Then you got off light! Didn't you know I could put you in irons for mutiny?"

At that the sniffing sailor burst out in a clamor of frenzied protest. "I wasn't meanin' no mutiny—'struth I wasn't! But when I shipped on this craft I didn't 'ave no idea what she was up to. I thought we was just goin' fishin'. An' I don't want no bloody revenooers shootin' at me, or throwin' me in jail—gorblime, no! An' I hears if they even ketches you with so much as a sealskin aboard, much less huntin' 'em—"

But here Captain Waters interrupted him. "That'll do! You can go forward and do your work, or you can spend the rest of the trip below in irons, whichever you please. Go forward. And you, Mister Tagle; I thought you said every man you shipped knew exactly what we planned and was in on shares?"

"He did know, the blasted liar!" The mate snorted scornfully. "That damn cockney knowed—or he would

'a' knowed if he hadn't been so blithering drunk."

He went forward, cursing the sailor ahead of him as he went.

For a long moment the schooner captain gazed after him; then slowly he turned about to where Barry had been watching and listening.

Barry's face was white and tense; his eyes gleamed. "So that's what your hunting is, is it, Captain Waters? Seal hunting—poaching—piracy!"

The stocky sea captain's lips and eyes were as grim as Barry's as he made terse answer. "That's right, Mr. Barry. What are you going to do about it?"

For the moment Barry stared. Then he spoke indignantly, recklessly. "Do about it? Why the same as I would any other pirate or sea robber—turn you over to the authorities if I can. Turn you in as I would Captain Kidd or Jesse James!"

AGAIN that half grim, half sardonic smile lurked at the corners of the schooner captain's mouth.

"How do you know just how guilty Captain Kidd was? Or what provocation Jesse James may have had? However, since you make the comparison, I'll tell you that the only reason I won't try to rob an express office or the United States Treasury is because I know very little about such things on land. I'm a seaman, and, as the old saying goes, I stick to my last. I set out to rob the treasure house I know best, the treasury of the sea."

Barry snorted. "And you expect me to help you? You expect I'll turn pirate too—after being shanghaied?"

"Why not? You were only shanghaied because you wouldn't come otherwise—and as I told you, I needed an extra hunter. No, when we find

the herd, you'll be shooting as straight as the next—unless I'm mightily mistaken in you, Mr. Barry."

Barry could but stare. The coolness, the assurance of the man was amazing—preposterous.

"Are you crazy?" Barry snapped. "Sealing! Don't you know the revenue cutters patrol those waters like bloodhounds from break-up to freeze-up? Cutters that can seize you merely for being in forbidden waters without authority!"

"They'll have to catch us first, Mr. Barry."

"Huh! The revenue cutters will have you before you have even a dozen sealskins stowed away."

"Revenue cutters!" The stocky schooner man's face for the first time lost its placid confidence. A rage as sudden and tempestuous as a line squall seemed to sweep over him. Doubling up his fists, he thrust them under Barry's nose.

"Do you see these wrists—these scars? From steel handcuffs, Mr. Barry! Do you see these hands? Cut and calloused from the rockpile, Mr. Barry! And do you know who sent me to all that? Your precious revenue men—may they burn in hell eternal! Do you think I'd let them get their hands on me again? Mr. Barry, I'd sail this schooner and all hands aboard straight to Davy Jones's locker first!"

Here was a rage that was more than mere passion; it was a madness—the madness of a man who has long brooded over real or fancied wrongs. Barry realized that to defy a man in such a state was deadly dangerous, yet he had to speak.

"Captain Waters, I for one don't intend to be sailed to Davy Jones's locker by a madman. And I won't be! Do you see that ship over there?"

He pointed forward to where, out of the sea on the windward bow, had materialized a long, low, swift craft. Its masts, its stacks, the speed with which it came, identified it as a Navy destroyer bound in for Bremerton. And it was evident from its course that it would pass within short hail of the schooner.

"All I have to do is to sing out, and she'll come over and put a stop to your whole crazy scheme," said Barry.

"Destroyer, eh?" The stocky schooner man watched it keenly, but apparently without alarm. "It's inconvenient—but for you, not me, Mr. Barry. You will have to give me your word immediately that you will not hail that destroyer when she comes up."

"Promise?" Barry laughed scornfully. "The only promise I'll give you is to escape at the first opportunity. I'm going to hail that destroyer when she comes by!"

PERHAPS you won't be here to do that by then, Mr. Barry."

Barry laughed again. "I admit you could murder me and throw me overboard—but the lookout on that destroyer has already got his eyes on this schooner, and the officer on watch has, too. They could see you throw me overboard even if you did it this minute."

The schooner captain did not answer. He turned forward. "Mr. Tagle!"

The bull-necked gorilla-like mate came lurching aft. His beady eyes glanced at the captain, then rested on Barry. "Yes, sir, capt'n?"

"Take Mr. Barry below and lock him up in the hunters' cabin until I send word to let him out!"

"Yes, sir, capt'n."

The hulking Tagle turned on Barry. His pig eyes gleamed.

Barry took a half step backward. If he could hold out for a few minutes, the destroyer would be within easy hail.

"Luff her!" suddenly shouted the captain to the helmsman.

Down went the wheel; with a shivering and slatting of canvas the *Aurora* shot her nose up into the wind. The oncoming destroyer vanished, hidden from sight by the fluttering head-sails.

The giant mate snarled, doubled up his fists; he took a step toward Barry. "Ain't coming, huh? D'you want me to knock you over and drag you down by the heels—huh?"

Barry shrugged his shoulders. But it was to the stocky Captain Waters that he addressed his answer. "I'll go. But since you want promises, I'll make you one. If this big gorilla ever lays hands on me, I'll kill him the first chance I get—so help me God!"

Turning, he stepped to the hatch and down the ladder. At his heels he could hear the mate following, grunting curses.

Just at the foot of the ladder, to one side, opened the narrow many-bunked cabin where Barry had awakened a little while before. But straight aft, through an open door, he could glimpse another little cabin. There was a tiny table there. Setting it with dishes and, strangely enough, clean linen, was the Chinaman.

But it was not the Chinaman that caught Barry's eye. It was some one else who had just rounded the table and was coming forward through the open door, as if to go on deck. That some one was a girl of eighteen or twenty, simply dressed in skirt and blouse—but she was the prettiest girl Barry had ever seen.

As she caught sight of them, she stopped suddenly. Her eyes fastened on Barry; they grew large with surprise and inquiry. "Why, Mr. Tagle," she said, as artlessly as a child, "who—who is that? Is he going with us?"

Barry could not see, because the mate was behind him. But he could hear the sneering triumph in the mate's gruff answer: "Yes, this is our new hunter, Miss Betty! And a hell of a fine catch we'll have if we got to depend on him, if you ask me! But get in there, you slick dude, before I push your backbone through your neck!"

He gave a shove. As Barry reeled forward into the little side cabin with the many bunks, he heard the door close and lock behind him, and then the mate's mocking laugh.

CHAPTER III.

SEALS HO!

THE *Aurora* was a powerful schooner, but in addition to her bellying sails she had a sturdy auxiliary motor. Now, close-hauled, she fought the westerlies for sea room, and then turned her dripping forefoot for the far reaches of the Aleutians.

Besides Barry, in the hunters' quarters, there were three men bunked: Tagle the mate, and Finster and Gustavsen, the other two hunters. Captain Waters and his daughter had the after cabin entirely to themselves. In the fo'c's'le forward lived the rest of the crew; six or seven men, including Sing Shu, the Chinaman, who was cook. But of the fo'c's'le hands, Barry saw little or nothing, excepting for the friendly Sing Shu.

Finster and Gustavsen, the other two hunters, were both men of few words; matter of fact individuals who took

things as they came. Of the two, Finster, a dark black-browed man of forty, was apt to side with the mate in whatever arguments arose in the hunters' cabin. And Tagle, the mate, from the very first had taken upon himself to be as hostile toward Barry as occasions allowed. It was a hostility so deep that Barry wondered what could be behind it.

Westward and northward the Aurora drove, into the shrouding mists and the clear cold of a varying spring. They were close to the Aleutians, and in the hunters' cabin they talked of the coming raid on the seal herd as calmly as farmers might have discussed the prospects of a harvest.

"Wonder when the Old Man 'll be settin' a masthead lookout?" commented Finster. "Might pick up the herd any time now."

But Gustavsen, a man of almost sixty and with an air of vast experience, shook his head. "It bane early spring dis year—de ice, she mont' ahead of last year, almos'. We sight no seal dis side de Pass."

"But they were sighted off Vancouver just a bit back."

"Ya, but de seal, she keep close on de tail o' de ice. She bane to de Pass already—t'rough de Pass. You watch what I tal' you—we don' see seal till oder side de Pass. Unless mebbe we find some feedin' at de hondred fat'om curve."

Finster scowled. "Yeah—an' up around the islands the government cutters 'll be sweepin' them waters like a damn' broom!"

Gustavsen shrugged his shoulders. "When de ice she go early, de fog she come plenty. If de cutter come, we play hide-und-seek mit her till de freeze-up come—ya!"

"Hide-and-seek hell!" snarled

Tagle. "With any sort of breeze, and room to run in, what with the kicker going we could outrun most any damned revenuer on the coast."

"You can't outrun a three-inch shell, though," said Barry coolly. "Or even a six-pounder."

Finster turned on him snarling. "Say—what sort of seal hunter are you? Afraid of the revenuers, are you?"

"Yeah, that's what I wanter know!" rasped the mate. "In a game like this, we can't take chances. How about it, fellow—if the cutters caught us, would you fight or quit?"

Instead of replying, Barry turned to Gustavsen. "Which would you do?"

The old Swede lighted his pipe and took a couple of leisurely puffs before answering. "Mebbe ya, mebbe na," he said deliberately. "I don' keer for bullet in de stoomach—but I don' keer for four-five year in jail, neider. Und when I t'ink of two-t'ree t'ousan' seal skin—and my share of dot money—ya, I t'ink mebbe I get de rifle und fight, too. But what for is all der argument? De captain, he don' give nobody chance to quit. By golly, he hate revenuer like hal'! He run a cutter down und go mit her sooner than be took in."

The old Swede was right; they sighted no seals south of Unimak. They came to the Pass and slipped through it, into the berg-ridden waters of Bering Sea. And here they came to the dividing of the ways: the Pribilofs and the forbidden waters of the seal herds lay to the north and west, whereas the last of the fishing banks lay almost east-northeast, along the shores of Bristol Bay. No innocent fishing vessel would have any occasion for being hundreds of miles from the banks and in the questionable neighborhood of St. Paul and St. George.

Hence as the *Aurora* held her course, merely swinging slightly more northerly, the quicker to pick up the feeding grounds on the hundred fathom curve, vigilance of the lookouts was redoubled. Always was there a man at the masthead with eyes strained, not only for the bobbing black spots of the seal herd, but for the first faint streak of smoke on the horizon that would betray the detested revenue cutters, as well.

NOW for the first time the girl, Betty Waters, began to spend hours on deck, mostly on the poop, but sometimes even climbing to the lookout barrel on the foremast.

But even here she retained most of the reserve that had marked her seclusion in the cabin. She spoke freely with her father and the cook, Sing Shu, and with old Gustavsen. At other times she would stand for hours, looking off across the gray seas toward the north and west. And to Barry's searching eyes, there seemed to be in her brooding gaze a worry, a secret dread that lent a haunting note to her otherwise striking beauty.

He would have sounded her out, made friends with her, but her quiet reserve fended him off. She was agreeable when spoken to, but that was all; and she invariably found some quick excuse to go below.

But to his surprise, Barry sensed that toward Finster and the mate, Tagle, she was even more reserved—in fact she exhibited a brusqueness that was almost an aversion. Half a dozen times Barry saw the mate approach her as she stood at the wheel or railing, and with a smirking grin endeavor to draw her into bantering conversation. And half a dozen times, the girl retreated to the cabin with a promptness

that would have impressed any but a man of the crudity of the giant Tagle.

Eventually, however, even he seemed to sense the fact that she was deliberately avoiding him. And early one forenoon, right after breakfast, Barry saw the mate deliberately step in front of her as she turned toward the cabin hatch. There was a smirk on the mate's face, and a pretended playfulness of manner, but there was no mistaking the fact that he had deliberately placed himself squarely across the way of the girl's retreat below.

The girl realized it, too. She did not attempt to step around; she turned and faced the mate squarely. Her chin went up, her eyes narrowed and her brows lowered indignantly. Yet the mate did not move.

Barry felt sudden tides of wrath rising in him; he was seized with a sudden irresistible desire to leap across the dozen paces that intervened between the schooner's waist, where he stood, and the bullying giant—to leap across those dozen paces and plant his clenched fist in the center of the mate's bullying features.

His fists clenched unconsciously, his muscles tensed; he was on the point of making his first forward leap, when all at once a giant, forbidding hand clamped on his shoulder. It held him back, held him fast like a steel hawser, and at the same moment Sing Shu's low voice cackled in his ear:

"Stan' still! Mistel Bally, stan' still all samee Sing Shu!"

Vainly Barry twisted, struggled to break free. And then the whole situation was changed by the casual voice from forward of Captain Waters on the fo'c's'le head: "Mr. Tagle! Mr. Tagle! Come here and look at this jib! She's ripped almost out o' the bolt-ropes!"

The mate turned. And in that second the girl slipped past and below—was halfway down the companion before Tagle looked back.

The mate came forward; there was an angry scowl on his face, and as he passed Barry could hear him curse beneath his breath.

"Humph! Some day Bull Tagle all same gettee head bust in!" muttered the Chinaman's voice amazingly in Barry's ear. As Barry turned, Sing Shu was just slipping something back in his waist-band. It was a short but heavy steel marlin-spike, as dangerous to stab with as to strike.

As Barry's eyes widened, the yellow man's face relaxed from its scowl. "Mistel Bally, you all samee take care yo'self. No standee close to lail on dark night—no!"

"Huh? What?" Then Barry's eyes narrowed. "Keep away from the rail, eh? Thanks, Sing Shu. But why has Tagle got it in for me particularly, Sing Shu?"

For a second the yellow face grinned. "Mistel Tagle, he no likee any man too good-lookkee, 'lound Miss Betty. Mistel Tagle, he too muchee like big monkey hisself. You takee cale, Mistel Bally!"

As Barry stood silent, pondering this unexpected bit of information, there suddenly came from the masthead lookout a wild excited bellow.

"Seals! Seals ho! Seals on the sta'board bow!"

IMMEDIATELY on the Aurora all was excitement. Men were running, captain and mate were shouting; even the girl came hurrying on deck again. At the same time Sing Shu disappeared down the cabin hatch.

Now the crew were breaking out the nested boats, casting off the sea-lash-

ings. Sing Shu appeared again, in his arms several rifles and shotguns, as well as well-filled belts of shells. Evidently the weapons were kept, when not in use, in some sort of armory in the captain's cabin.

Up to then Barry had seen nothing of the sighted herd. Now all at once his searching eye picked up what at first seemed only a black dot or two between the surges—more dots, everywhere, all around. The Aurora was almost upon them. Seals, sleeping or feeding, only the bare tips of their heads above water.

With a fluttering of canvas, the schooner rounded to; she lost headway. The first boat was shoved over the rail. Gustavsen, with one of the fo'c's'le hands for a rower, manned it, pulled away as the Aurora surged ahead once more. Before the next boat was swung out, a half mile beyond, Barry heard the whiplike crack of the Swede's first shot.

Finster was in the second boat launched, and to Barry's surprise the mate took the hunter's seat in the third. As the fourth was made ready, Barry grew tense. If the schooner captain should order him into that fourth boat, Barry was determined to refuse.

But at the last moment, he was surprised. It was the stocky schooner captain himself who, rifle in hand, stood by to step aboard.

"Mr. Barry, to-morrow you start huntin'," he said tersely. "But to-day you can stay aboard and see how it is done."

Then he was gone. Left aboard were only two or three men besides the girl and Barry.

For a moment Barry's brain fired with the thought of escape. But then the utter impossibility of the plan forced itself upon him. If there were

any weapons left aboard they would be securely hidden where he could never get at them. And without arms, it was hopeless to think of overpowering or intimidating even the giant Sing Shu alone.

Barry gave up the idea almost before he had conceived it.

The schooner was now jogging back up wind toward where she had put out the first boat. Sing Shu, who seemed to be all around sailor as well as cook, was at the wheel. The fore'sle hands were forward, and Betty Waters was standing alone at the windward rail on the little poop. Her face was flushed with excitement, and vagrant strands of her hair were whipping in the breeze—but again Barry thought he had never seen such a haunting expression of sadness about the eyes and mouth.

On an impulse he approached her.

"Miss Waters," he said, "why don't you try to make your father give up this mad undertaking—before it is too late?"

She did not retreat below, but he was surprised how quickly her face changed. It became hard, bitter, as in a flash.

"Mr. Barry," she said fiercely, "do you know the laws of salvage? Did you ever hear of the wreck of the North Star?"

Barry was taken by surprise. "I know something about salvage, as every seaman does. But the North Star—no, I don't recall any such ship. Was she a salvage job?"

"She was a Klondike Trading Company boat running between Frisco and the Yukon. One trip, southbound with over two millions in gold, she hit a rock just south of the Pass. There was a heavy sea running, with a half-gale. All hands took to the boats and

made the shore except the captain and one other man who stayed by the ship and the gold."

The girl paused, looked bitterly across the sea, and went on.

"My father came along in his little fishing boat next day. The storm was worse and the North Star's captain had become scared; he begged to be taken off, too. My father took him. But when he had put him ashore on the nearest island, my father learned what the North Star's cargo was, and he took a desperate chance; he went back and boarded the North Star. And next day, by great luck, the storm went down."

"And your father got a salvage award?" inquired Barry interestedly. "That is the salvage law—the first man aboard an abandoned ship has salvage claims on both ship and cargo if it can be saved."

"I know. But a government revenue cutter came along that very next day, and the North Star's captain got it to take him back to the wreck. Then he claimed that the wreck had never been abandoned—that my father had no right to salvage. And the revenue cutter officers sided with the North Star's captain!"

BARRY looked incredulous. "But why—why should they have lied like that? The revenue cutter men could not have hoped to gain anything by it; they were not eligible for salvage, anyway. No government vessel is allowed to claim salvage."

"No. But the revenue men hated fishermen—all fishermen—that year, because some fishermen had been raiding the seal herds the cutters were there to guard. They didn't want any fisherman to get all that salvage award. And besides, the cutter cap-

tain and the North Star's captain were old friends. If the North Star's captain had admitted abandoning his ship, and another man had boarded her and stayed by her, the captain would have been discharged—and the Alaska Trading Company would have lost a lot of money in salvage claims!"

"I should say so!" whistled Barry. "Two millions in gold—why, salvage on the cargo alone would have amounted to hundreds of thousands! And the ship—but was the ship saved?"

"Yes. After they had put my father off, forcibly, the crew came back aboard and managed to get her off, at high tide, with the cutter's help, and back to Unalaska where they made temporary repairs. Now do you wonder father hates the revenue men so?"

Barry could only shake his head. "Can't say I blame him much."

"But that isn't all. When father's claim was tried in court, and the witnesses got up and lied, father was so furious and desperate he lost all control. There was a fight right in the court room. And father hurt one of the revenue men badly—and for that they gave him five years in jail! On top of cheating him of his salvage!"

"Humph." Again Barry pondered, worriedly. "But I can't see what that all has to do with this seal piracy."

"Don't you? Well, it is the only way we can get even. The government—the Revenue Service—cheated us out of two or three hundred thousand dollars of salvage, by their testimony. We can't collect it from the North Star owners, so we are going to try to collect it from the government. And the government owns the seal herds. Also by raiding them, we are getting our own back at the special expense of the revenue cutters who are supposed to guard them."

"How long ago was this? Are those revenue men still in the service?"

"No, it was long years ago. That revenue cutter captain is dead—we don't know where the others are. But they've got to pay—the government has to pay somehow!"

"Yes—and a few thousand seal skins at present prices would pay back a lot." Barry looked at her searchingly. "How long has your father been thinking up this idea?"

"Ever since I can remember. We had to save a long time to buy this boat and fit it out. When we're through, we'll sell the skins and boat—father knows where and how—and we'll just take the money and drop out of sight. We'll not have guilty consciences; we've merely taken back what was stolen from us."

"Maybe," said Barry, noncommittally. "But what about the crew—Tagle, Finster, Gustavsen—the men forward? Aren't they nothing but pirates—in it for just what they can get out of it?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders. "That's the government's fault, not ours. We have to use whatever means we can to win."

"Uh-huh. And, excepting Gustavsen, I'd trust them just as far as I could throw a feather to windward," said Barry grimly. "But there's one thing you haven't taken into consideration, Miss Waters: the seals themselves. You'd exterminate an already almost extinct species to collect a small debt?"

"Exterminate them? Why, the government itself kills thousands every year, and sells their skins!"

"Only the superfluous males, Miss Waters. And they do it ashore where each one can be carefully picked. But out here in the open sea, the sealers

kill male and female alike. And this is the breeding season, Miss Waters. Every time you kill a full grown female, you starve a baby seal to death—they won't nurse with any except their own mothers."

"HOW do you know all this?" The girl looked at him with surprise.

"There was a man on a ship I was once on—he had been on a government commission appointed just to look into sealing. He told me about it—how the slaying of the cows had almost destroyed the seal herds in a few short years. That's why the laws against pelagic sealing—sealing in the open sea—were passed; to keep the seals from being exterminated."

"But my father says you can tell the males from the females."

"Perhaps. But do you think that will make any difference to men like Tagle and Finster, for instance?"

The girl did not answer. The schooner was well up at the windward end of the line of boats, where Gustavsen had been put over first. And now he was already signaling.

They ran alongside and tossed him a line. Gustavsen had several seals, all big ones, with thick white-gray manes; each shot cleanly through the head.

"Ya! But if I get close enough to see if dey bane cow, dey wake oop und dive like hal," said the big Swede. "Den you got to shoot him quick und straight. But I lose only one—and he sink before we can get to him, ya."

Finster likewise had all good-sized males. But when they came to the mate's boat Barry, seeing the small size of some of the catch, not over eighty pounds in weight, realized immediately that these were females—cows. And as the bodies were hoisted

aboard for skinning he saw a milky white fluid on the deck. Visions of starving baby seals back at the hauling grounds sickened him.

He poured out his protests into Captain Waters's ears when that stocky individual came aboard a few minutes later. "You—you expect me to join you in this? This slaughter of babies as well as cows?" he demanded fiercely. "Look there! Look at those cows that Tagle brought in!"

But the stocky schoonerman only nodded. "That's why I'm sure you are going to help me."

"Help you?" Barry stared.

"Yes. You and I and Gustavsen are good shots, all of us. We can wait to pick out the grown males before we shoot, and still make a fair catch. Tagle—and even Finster—are not that good; they have to use the shotgun, and to shoot when they can. If you hunt yourself, you can be sure that no cows are being killed. If you don't, Tagle will have to take your boat—and you see what he brings in."

Barry looked again at the small milky bodies lying on the deck and then away across the seas, beyond which lay the Pribilofs. He clenched his fist.

"I'll hunt," he said tersely. "Anything is better than having this go on. But Tagle will pay for this, if there's any justice on land or sea!"

But it was not Tagle's ruthless slaughter of the cows alone that had prompted Barry to change his decision. There was something else—something he had noticed during that first day's raid on the herd.

AT dawn, then, next morning when the hunters were out, Barry replaced the mate in the third boat. As Barry swung himself down into the tossing boat he found himself sur-

prisedly looking into the yellow face of the giant Sing Shu, who sat on the rower's thwart. Sing Shu answered Barry's amazed stare with a bland grin.

"Mistel Bally shootee, Sing Shu catchum seal—plenty seal, chop-chop," cackled the Chinaman confidently. "Nighttime, we allee same high-line boat."

With one powerful shove he sent the boat surging a dozen feet clear of the schooner. At the same time he reached under the thwart and brought forth the very rifle Barry had so admired in the hotel room that night, and with it a belt of cartridges.

Barry's eyes narrowed at this additional proof of Captain Waters's sharpness. The schooner captain had been careful to withhold the weapon from Barry's hands until he was clear of the schooner—out in the open in a small boat that could offer no defense if Barry sought to make armed resistance to the schooner captain's plans.

In choice of his field of operations, too, the stocky Captain Waters had been equally strategic. Here along the hundred-fathom curve was the favorite feeding grounds of the herd. From the breeding grounds at the Pribilofs, scores of sea miles to the northward, the seals unerringly picked their course to this locality where they found their favorite food—squid and a small smelt-like fish—in abundance. Here came the cows within ten days after the birth of their pups, and here came the young bulls, and even the great *sikatches* or harem monsters, when August came around.

Almost immediately Sing Shu stilled his oars and cried out in an excited cackle: "Looke! Big seal—all same two hunded pound! Big bull seal—lookee, chop-chop!"

Barry looked. There, not a hundred yards away, a seal's head with dripping whiskers and big staring eyes had popped out of the water between surges. He had either been asleep or feeding when disturbed by the approach of these invaders of the grounds. The whiskers and the "wig" or mane of long yellowish white hairs at the back of his neck identified him as an almost full grown male.

"Shootee! Shootee, chop - chop!" begged the Chinaman excitedly. "He wakee up—he dive in mlinute!"

But Barry had already snatched the rifle to his shoulder. His eye found the sights, lined them lightning-like. His finger found the trigger—pressed it. *Crack!*

Simultaneously with the whip-like report the boat shot forward under the mighty strokes of Sing Shu. The stout oars all but cracked as the giant Chinaman lay back on them. Even as he drove the boat along the Chinaman cried out excitedly:

"Catchee hook! Catchee hook befo' dead seal sink!"

The hook was a sharp-pointed gaff-hook under Barry's feet. Barry snatched it up and stood ready in the bow as the boat surged forward to the reddened water. The seal himself, after a frantic flurry that showed his nearly full six feet of length above the surface, had already disappeared. Barry could see it sinking, two, three feet under water already as they surged over it.

THE boat stopped almost short as with a mighty stroke Sing Shu backed water. Darting the lance-like gaff deep down Barry hooked the sinking bull securely and drew him to the surface where Sing Shu, with looped rope, was waiting.

He was a *sikatch*—a full grown bull. Six feet long, almost four and a half through, he went a full four hundred pounds or close to it. His fur was a dark brown that was all but black, interspersed with the long whitish-yellow over-fur that culminated at the back of the neck in the so-called "wig."

"One mo' second, we no catchee," said Sing Shu critically, as he picked up the trailing oars again. "No catchee quick, seal all samee sink, no catchee 'tall. Nex' time you shootee mo' quick—Sing Shu no have to blust 'em oar."

With which ironical assertion, he turned to look for the next quarry.

As the hunt progressed Barry found that the stocky schooner captain had been right; this hunting, even totally devoid of danger as it was, was nevertheless exciting. It was hunting that required lightning-quick coördination, snap judgment, the instantaneous response of nerve and muscle.

To distinguish indubitably between a grown cow and a young bull when all that one saw was the black tip of a head above water required that the hunter get close up. If he waited too long the quarry would take alarm and dive with the speed of light. If he shot too soon, there was an excellent chance of the seal's diving or sinking before the boat could come up.

But here Sing Shu's great strength and skill with the oars gave Barry an extra advantage. Barry had not believed it possible for a boat to cover the water so swiftly. On his part, Barry's snap shooting delighted the Chinaman.

"Hot doggee!" he cried elatedly. "Beat even big Swede, Gustavsen!"

By the time the *Aurora* had dropped the fourth boat and beaten back to windward, they already had four seals

—as many as they conveniently could handle. Sing Shu hoisted a bit of white canvas on an oar as a signal. The *Aurora* bore down and ran alongside.

Betty Waters herself was at the helm, and it was the mate who threw them a line to hang onto while the catch was being whipped aboard. The mate looked down and sneered as Barry made fast to the bow line.

"Only four, heh? The way I've been hearing of you, I was expectin' a full dozen at least."

"Yes. But l o o k e e — all bull. No catchem one 'cow, mistel," retorted Sing Shu before Barry could answer.

The mate's face twisted into a snarl. "Shut your mouth, you damn Chink, before I knock all your teeth down it! And come aboard here and help swing in these damned sea-bears!"

Sing Shu obeyed. But as he clambered past Barry, his almond eyes between their lashes gleamed with angry light.

AS the day progressed, the boats became more scattered and the jaunts of the *Aurora* longer as she followed the hunt. No time was taken out for meals; bread and meat and water had been placed in each boat before the start, and the hunters made their meals as they hunted.

By late afternoon the boats were well scattered out. The leeward boat was out of sight from Barry where he sat, and the *Aurora* was almost hull down when she turned to swing back on her tramp up and down.

Barry studied the lowering sun long and searchingly. If the *Aurora* made one more jaunt to leeward—

But she did not. She beat back to windward, hove to and picked up the first boat. Again she hove to, and again veered away. She came sweeping down

on Barry's boat like a petrel on the wing, riding the surges and with her spars and canvas silhouetted against the sunset sky like an etching.

As Barry caught the thrown line, the figure of Captain Waters himself appeared at the schooner's rail.

"Pass up your gun and belt," he ordered, "and then come aboard yourself. Sing Shu and the rest will look after the boat." Then as Barry climbed wearily aboard, "How many?" inquired the stocky schooner captain.

"Forty-seven," said Barry, giving the count of the total number he had brought alongside during the day.

"By thunder, that's high gun for the day, I'll bet you!" ejaculated the stocky man enthusiastically. "I knew you would show us some shooting, when you pitched in."

"It is high gun for the day, Dad." Betty Waters appeared, paper and pencil in hand. "I've been keeping score. Mr. Barry leads with forty-seven, all bulls; Gustavsen is second with forty; you're next with thirty-eight; and Finster is low man with only thirty-three."

"That old dried-up Swede can shoot

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



The Cliff Dwellers

AS science advances, the history of the extinct races that once inhabited the North American continent slowly comes to light. The cliff dwellers were one of these races. Many of the cliff dwellings have been entered and their secrets unraveled. But it is not generally known that there are still many cliff dwellings that a white man has never entered.

They are to be found intact, just as their owners left them in the dim past, high on the sides of the cliffs of the Grand Cañon. Located in southern Utah, below where two mighty rivers, the Green and the Rio Grande, merge to roar through that mighty gorge, the Grand Cañon, the cliff dwellers' homes have been hidden away from the march of progress, holding their secrets until some way is found to scale the cliffs and enter. Who knows what interesting things might be found there?

Roy T. Wilcox.

with anybody when he's right," grunted the schooner captain gruffly. "Well, let's see—one hundred and fifty-eight skins for the day isn't bad."

"And how many of that hundred and fifty-eight were females—cows that will leave a starving pup apiece?"

"Not but ten cows in the lot—and not all of those will have left pups too young to feed," responded the schooner captain tersely. "That is a fine average, Mr. Barry, if you compare it with the old days. In 1894 the sealers took one hundred and forty thousand skins, of which seventy per cent were females."

"Perhaps not a bad average comparatively—but I wonder what those eight or nine starving pups would think about it, Captain Waters," said Barry. As he spoke, he was looking full at Betty Waters.

The girl's face went white with pain, then she bit her lip and her eyes flashed darkly. "Write and tell that to the revenue people—and the North Star's owners, why don't you, Mr. Barry?" she retorted. "They'd probably cry over it."

With a whirl she was gone.

Blood-Red Gold

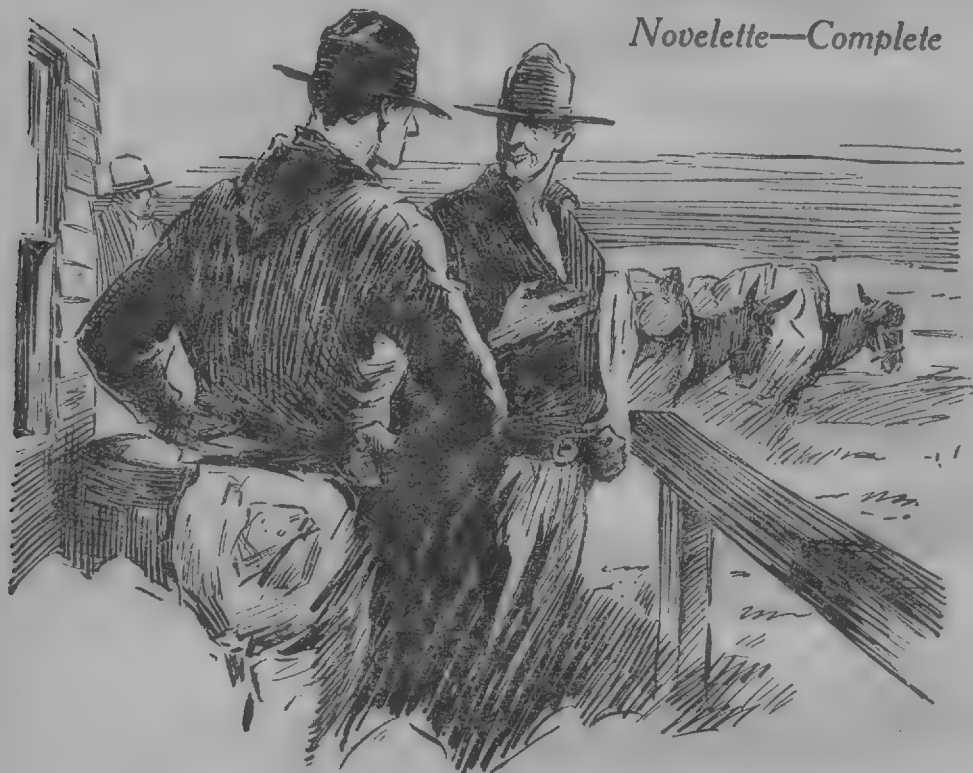
Cold and shrewd was Harry Ortley, and he calculated every risk as he tried to use the desert's inexorable might against the desert's own sons

A Whispering Tale

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

Author of "The Valley of Little Fears," "A Year in a Day," etc.

Novelette—Complete



They watched the strange pair start into the desert

CHAPTER I.

THE HUMAN JUGGERNAUT.

NOBODY knows all that happens, right at the finish, when the desert has her way with a man. It's a grim secret that only the desert herself and the buzzards can tell.

But this much is certain. Right at the last, the victim tears off his shirt

and starts digging with his hands. I've found my share of bodies in the desert, and I know others who have found their share. In every case shirts torn from backs, fingers shredded by the cruel sand-gravel of the desert.

That's why we didn't take so kindly to Harry Ortley's story of what had happened—not after we found Grahame's body.

I'd first seen Harry Ortley when he drove into Randsburg. It wasn't any trouble to judge his character. He was one of those birds who played sure things. You couldn't figure him taking a chance of any kind, or giving another fellow a break.

Stringy Martin was standing with me when Ortley drove into Randsburg. He had a sedan, and he parked it in front of the Palace Restaurant, locked

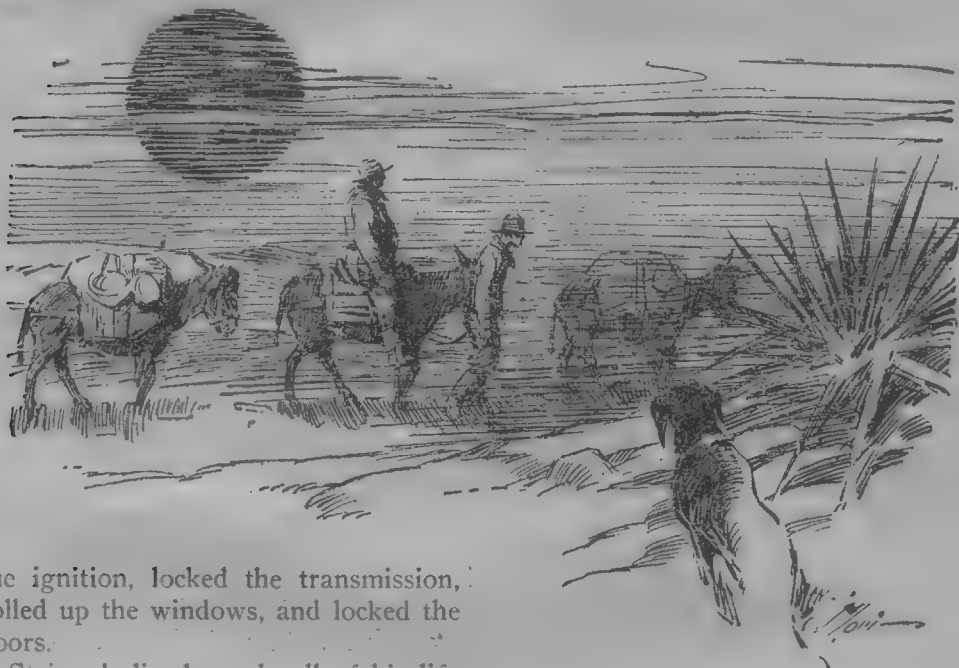
comes to people who are accustomed to getting what they want. He was about forty, and his eye was as cold as the top of Telescope Peak in the winter. His cheeks were round, but his mouth was unusually small.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a thin, reedy voice, "good afternoon."

Stringy nudged me.

"He's speakin' to you," he said.

"Howdy," I said.



the ignition, locked the transmission, rolled up the windows, and locked the doors.

Stringy's lived nearly all of his life in the desert. He watched the performance, then turned to me with a grin.

"If that fellow ever raised a bet it'd be a cinch he held better than three of a kind," he said.

And, somehow or other, it was the best description of the man's character you could make. Stringy's like that—always pulling some crack that hits a bull's-eye.

Ortley walked into the restaurant.

He was fat, not paunchy fat, but the smooth, well-distributed sleek fat that

The cold eyes turned from Stringy to me, me to Stringy, and back to me.

"I am to meet a man named Sidney Grahame," he said.

I couldn't see how the information meant anything in my young life, but the cold eyes kept boring into mine as though I was supposed to do something about it.

"Don't know him," I said.

The eyes continued steady.

"I was to meet him here in Randsburg. He was to have a string of burros. I'd like to get started to-night."

There wasn't any apology in his tone, and there wasn't any request. He was the type that was accustomed to make his wishes known, and have men jump to do his bidding.

"Stranger," I told him, "you ain't accustomed to the desert."

The eyes never wavered:

"No. That's why I felt you might secure some information for me while I was eating. I haven't had a bite since breakfast. You should be able to find him by locating the string of burros."

And he ignored the lunch counter, sprawled his bulk in a chair at one of the tables, and picked up the bill of fare. As far as he was concerned, the incident was closed.

Stringy Martin snickered.

Mary Garland, who was running the Palace, chipped in with a bit of information. She'd heard the conversation.

"There's a gent named Sid something-or-other that's got his packs out in front of the hotel. I heard him mention he was waiting for some one."

The man looked up.

"Was the name Ortley, the one he was waiting for?"

"I d'know. I didn't hear any name."

Ortley looked at Stringy Martin.

"If you should be going by the hotel," he said, "you might tell this man that Mr. Ortley is here . . . I'll try some of the spare ribs, and you can give me a side order of roast lamb. Are your vegetables canned?"

STRINGY and I walked out before we heard what Mary had to tell him about the vegetables. There he was, plunked down in the middle of the Mojave desert, damned lucky to be getting anything, and wondering if the vegetables were canned.

Some folks get like that.

We sort of stuck around to see what happened when Ortley met his man. There were five burros tied up in front of the hotel, all packed and ready to go. Four of 'em were pack animals, and one had a riding saddle. He was a big burro, and he looked to be a good one.

The chap who was crouched down on the porch of the hotel, hugging what little shade there was, was a lunger. You couldn't miss that. But he was beating the game. There was a lustre to the brown skin, and a strong set to the jaw. His eyes had lost the feverish glitter, and were steady.

Ortley came crunching down the road after a while.

"Mr. Grahame?" he asked.

The thin chap got to his feet, his face all crinkled with a cordial smile.

"You're Harry Ortley. Mighty glad to meet you. I've got something that'll sure interest you this trip. Been waiting since morning."

"I was delayed. Did you get my message?"

"What message?"

"I sent a man to tell you I was here."

"Nobody said anything to me."

"Humph. Well, let's start."

"I ain't eaten anything. Better have a snack before we get going. We'll go pretty far to-night after it gets cool, and food will come in handy."

Ortley let his cold eyes drift over the packed burros, then turned them on Grahame.

"I doubt if we can waste time eating. You should have had your lunch. Where can I leave my car, where it will be safe?"

Sid Grahame flushed a little, then pointed to the building that had a dirt floor and a galvanized iron roof.

"You can park it in there," he said.

Ortley unlocked the door, unlocked the transmission, unlocked the ignition, drove the car into the garage, and locked it all up again. He took out a hand bag, and then strapped a big forty-five about his middle.

"We'll have to take my personal belongings," he said.

"Maybe we can put 'em in a roll. A hand bag's hard to pack," said Grahame.

Ortley's cold eye held his gaze.

"I prefer my things in the bag. They are more convenient that way."

Grahame took five minutes getting the bag tied on one of the packs. He didn't say anything while he was doing it.

"Only one saddle burro?" asked Ortley.

"Yes. We can take turns riding."

"I see," said Ortley, and climbed into the saddle.

They shuffled out into the desert and I heard Stringy Martin's chuckle in my ear as the last of the burros disappeared around the base of a sage covered hill.

"When," he asked me, "do you suppose it'll be the little guy's turn to ride the burro?"

I didn't answer the question. There wasn't any use.

CHAPTER II.

ONE MAN RETURNS.

THAT was the first time we saw Harry Ortley.

The second was when he came back from the desert—alone.

The desert hadn't been exactly kind to him. His eyes were swollen. His skin was red and angry. His boots had been dried and cracked by the desert

dust, and his flesh hung in bags under his eyes. But the eyes were as cold as ever.

He was leading the string of burros, and the packing wasn't anything to write home about. There were some sore backs in the train, but Ortley didn't mind a little thing like a burro's suffering.

He pulled up in front of the hotel and walked right to his hand bag that was tied on top of the pack. He seemed to be in a hurry because he didn't monkey with any pack rope knots. He pulled out a knife and cut the ropes. I noticed the bag seemed mighty heavy as he pulled it from the pack.

He walked right across to the garage and took a bunch of keys from his pocket. He unlocked the door of the automobile, put the hand bag in the machine, then locked the door. Then he walked across the street to us. He was walking pretty stiff, and his feet hurt him.

"I have a tragedy to report," he said.

His cold eyes were fastened on me, and I didn't like the looks of them.

"Yes?" I said.

"Yes. The gentleman who accompanied me, Sid Grahame, has perished of thirst in the desert. He became lost while prospecting for gold. I haven't seen him for three days."

"How do you know he's dead then?" I asked.

The cold eyes didn't so much as flicker. He shrugged his shoulders and waved his hand toward the desert. The gesture was as eloquent as any words would have been.

"Why in heck didn't you try to trail him and take water to him, instead of beating it back with all the water and supplies?" I said, and I could feel myself getting red in the face.

His voice was just the same steady tone I'd always heard. He didn't raise it, and he didn't apologize with it. He just spoke.

"I'm afraid I'm not adept at trailing, and it would have been dangerous for me to start out alone in the desert. I had a map showing me the way back, and I didn't take any chances."

I started to let him have it all, right then and there, but there wasn't any use, and the desert has its own code. It was a case of where minutes might be precious. A man lost in the desert is like a man overboard at sea.

WE got half a dozen of the old-timers around and went to work. Ortley told us no automobile could back-track his route and he was right on that. It took us three days to find Grahame's body, and then the buzzards led us to it. It wasn't where Ortley thought it should have been—not by a long ways.

There wasn't much we could do except bury him right there. We searched the clothes for addresses, and took his watch and a cigarette case and a knife. There wasn't much else.

Stringy Martin's voice was in my ear.

"That man didn't die of thirst."

I knew it, and I knew that a couple of other men in the crowd knew it.

"Ortley's lying," I admitted.

"Let's shake him down."

"After we get the body taken care of."

We made a grave where we found him. It was the only thing to do. Then we got Ortley in the center of a ring of attentive ears and made him repeat the story.

Stringy Martin did the talking.

"Then he must have got lost thirty miles away from here."

"I guess so. I'm not accustomed to the desert. I find it all seems strange to me."

"And you didn't get anywheres near this place?"

"Not that I can remember."

"There's the remains of a camp fire a couple of miles up this cañon, and marks where blankets were unrolled in the sand. And there's a tomato tin that's been opened, and some coffee grounds spilled on the desert, and there are some burro tracks—old, but burro tracks, just the same."

Ortley's eyes held Stringy's with a disdainful sort of expression in them.

"Well?" he asked.

"And this man didn't die of thirst. He was murdered by some means or other."

"How do you make that out?"

"Because he didn't dig with his hands, and his shirt's on. A man who dies of thirst starts running, and he rips his shirt off, and he gets down and tries to dig out the sand with his hands. And he keeps on digging, until you can see the marks of the desert on what's left of his hands. This man hadn't done none of those things."

Ortley shrugged his shoulders.

"As I said, I am not accustomed to the desert. But I have given you the facts as I remember them. Of course it is possible I was near here with the pack train. We may have camped here. I don't think so, but I wouldn't swear to it. I believe there are even cases of men traveling in a big circle in the desert and thinking they are going in a straight line, aren't there?"

"How did you get back to Randsburg?"

"I trusted the burros for a while, and then I saw the outline of that peculiar peak off to the left, and got my bearings from that. I had made a map."

"Where is that map?"

"I lost it. It blew out of my hands."

STRINGY MARTIN looked about him. What he saw in the faces of the rest of us apparently coincided with his own judgment. He started for the burros.

"Well, you'll have a chance to clean this thing up a bit before you leave Randsburg. We'll notify the sheriff when we get back to town."

Ortley said nothing. His eyes were steady, and cold.

We got in to Randsburg, and notified the sheriff over the telephone. He came out and brought the coroner with him. They put Ortley on the grill.

Ortley had money, and he fought the way people with money do. He hired a doctor from Los Angeles who specialized in testifying in court cases. That doctor came in with a suitcase filled with books, and he convinced the sheriff and the coroner that people who died with thirst didn't rip off their shirts and dig their fingers to the bone.

He laughed at the idea that any dying man would do such a thing. He quoted a lot of European doctors, and some statistics that had been compiled from Arabs in the Sahara desert or some place, and he made the sheriff think we were a bunch of boobs.

The sheriff told us that some of the circumstances were a little suspicious, but he didn't think the district attorney would care to go any further into the matter, and then he left.

You look at a map and you'll find Randsburg's pretty well out in the middle of the Mojave desert. As far as government goes, it's more or less of an orphan. It's in Kern County, but it's only a mile or two over the border from San Bernardino County. Both counties are bigger than some States.

Randsburg is so much like what the old mining camps were like that the wise guys will tell you there can't be such a place. It stretches along one twisting, unpaved street, a smear of sun-faded houses and rambling, false-fronted business structures.

It's a place that does pretty much what it pleases. And there's another place, not over three miles from it that does exactly as it pleases. You understand that a mining town out in the middle of the Mojave desert ain't governed by exactly the same rules that govern a city that's plunked down in the middle of the orange groves.

Ortley glowered at us with his cold eyes, walked to his automobile, unlocked the doors and the ignition and the transmission, and went away from there. There was nothing left behind except five burros and some desert whispers.

CHAPTER III.

COLD TRAIL.

NOW desert whispers are funny things. Maybe you've got to believe in the desert before you believe in desert whispers. At any rate, you've got to know what it's like to spend the long desert nights bedded down in the drifting sand before you'll know much about the desert, or the whispers, either.

The desert is peculiar. It's something that can't be described. You either feel the spell of the desert or you don't. You either hate it or you love it. In either event you'll fear it.

There it lies, miles on miles of it, dry lake beds, twisted mountains of volcanic rock, sloping sage-covered hills, clumps of Joshua trees, thickets of mesquite, bunches of giant cactus. It

has the moods of a woman, and the treachery of a big cat.

And always it's vaguely restive. During the daytime the heat makes it do a devil's dance. The horizons shimmer and shake. Mirages chase one another across the dry lake beds. The winds blow like the devil from one direction, and then they turn and blow like the devil from the other direction.

Sand marches on an endless journey, coming from Lord knows where, and going across the desert in a slithering procession of whispering noise that's as dry as the sound made by a sidewinder when he crawls past your blankets.

It's at night when the desert's still and calm and the steady stars blaze down like torches that you can hear the whispers best. Then you'll lie in your blankets with your head pillowed right on the surface of the desert, and you'll hear the dry sagebrush swish in the wind. It sounds as though the leaves are whispering. Then you'll hear the sand rattling against the cactus, and it'll sound like a different kind of a whisper, a finer, more stealthy whisper.

And then, usually just before you're getting to sleep, you'll hear that finest whisper of all, the sand whispering to the sand. Of course, if you'd wake up and snap out of it, you'd know that it was just the sound made by wind blown sand drifting across the sandy face of the desert.

But you don't wake up like that. You just drift off to sleep, lulled by the sound of the sand whispering to the sand.

I've never really figured it out, but I guess that's why the desert is so full of whispers. Strange stories seep through the desert just the way the sounds of the drifting sand seep into your ears. Take a man who has lived a long time

in the desert, and his voice gets a dry, husking whisper in it that's like the sound of a lizard's feet scratching along the surface of a sun-baked rock.

Everything whispers in the desert, and some of the whispers would sound reasonable anywhere. Some of 'em only sound reasonable when you're half asleep in the middle of the desert.

Edith Eason first came to me as a whisper.

I was camped up north of Shoshone when I heard of her. And I swear I can't tell who it was that first told me. It was just a whisper, a casual, seeping whisper. You'd probably laugh if I said so, but, somehow or other, I have an idea it was a sand whisper that first told me about her.

At any rate the name didn't sound strange to my ears when Humpy Crane gave me the low-down on her. It's the sort of a name that lends itself to a whisper. Sand, drifting over sand, or rustling against cactus would give forth a sound like that: "Eason—Eeeeeason — Eeeassssssssson — Edith Eassssson!"

HUMPY came in to my camp fire up north of Shoshone. I was camped on a slope of the Funeral Range, and it was a typical desert night. Humpy saw my supper fire, and came on over. I could hear him and his burro long before I could see them. Their feet shuffled through the dry sand with a sort of whispering noise that muffled the steps.

"Hello, Humpy," I said, when the fire lit on his lined face and white hair. "Had anything to eat?"

"Nope. I'm short o' grub, an' I saw your fire. Didn't know it was you, Bob Zane. Got any tea, or tomatoes?"

I opened the pack.

"I got a little of everything here,

old-timer. Sit down while I get her ready."

We ate under the stars. The burros moved around through the dwarf sage.

"Wasn't you one of the fellows that went in after the lunger that got bumped off in the desert?"

"You mean Sid Grahame, the one that went out with Ortley?"

"Yeah."

"Uh-huh, I was; why?"

"Nothin' much. There's a red-headed girl come out from Denver. Her name's Eason, Edith Eason. She's hanging around Randsburg, lookin' for you, or for Stringy Martin, either one."

"What's she want?"

"Don't know. It's got something to do with this lunger that got croaked. She grubstaked him or something, and she thinks he found some quartz stuff and was taking Ortley in to show it to him."

I sipped a graniteware cup of tea.

"That," I told him, "is different."

Even then, I began to put two and two together, the weight of the bag when Ortley had lifted it off the burro, the eager way he'd cut the pack ropes to get it loose.

"Eason, Edith Eason—I've heard the name somewhere."

"Maybe. It's a name that's easy on the ears. You goin' in to Randsburg?"

I hadn't been headed that way, but I didn't hesitate any when Humpy asked the question.

"I'm goin' back," I told him.

Edith Eason had bright red hair and eyes that were a calm gray. She looked like a woman who could manage her own way in the world.

"Sid was working in the office with me when he developed the sickness," she told me. "The doctors said sunshine and fresh air would cure him, but

he was cooped up in a stuffy office, and he wouldn't quit because he didn't have anything saved up and he didn't want to be a burden on any one.

"So I pretended to get awfully interested in mining, and then I told him I didn't want to be working for wages all of my life, and I was going out in the desert and prospect, or else grubstake some old desert rat. He warned me I'd get stung, and finally I worked the situation around so it seemed logical for me to offer to grubstake him in the desert and let him prospect.

"He was out six months in all, and he started to get well almost from the first. He wrote to me and mailed the letters whenever he came to a post office. Sometimes I'd get three or four of them in one mail. The last batch of letters said he had something that looked awfully good, that he had a capitalist coming in to look it over and that he'd let me know. Then the next I heard was when I read of his death. So I wrote to the sheriff for details, and he told me stuff that brought me out here."

SHE let her calm gray eyes bore right into mine, and read my mind.

"You think I'm a fool for giving up my job and trying to come out here, don't you?"

Out in the desert you get so you shoot straight from the shoulder on most things, or else you get crooked all over.

"Yes," I told her.

She nodded.

"That's the way I like men. You and I are going to get along."

"You talk as though you were considering adopting me," I said.

"I am," she said, and her eyes didn't even twinkle. "You and I are going into the desert together."

"Huh?"

"Yes. I want to see where Sid's buried, and I want to try and trail where they went on their expedition."

"It's a cold trail."

"I know it. But I've heard a lot about you, Bob Zane. They say you can make the desert talk to you, that there's nothing in the Mojave you can't find out."

I told her straight from the shoulder.

"Yes, ma'am, the desert talks all right. It talks in sand whispers that are easy to believe—in the desert. They don't sound probable anywhere else. I'm afraid you've been listening to sand whispers."

She shook her head and reached her hand inside the blouse of her suit. When it came out there was a little tissue paper parcel in the palm. She unfolded the paper parcel.

"Look," she said.

I looked, and then I looked again, and then I rubbed my eyes and looked some more.

They were little nuggets of red metal. They were almost blood-red, but I knew what they were even before I scratched under the red with the point of my knife.

"Gold," I told her. "It's a gold that's alluvial, and it's been through some chemical or other that's given it a red coating. You get all sorts of gold here in the desert. They even have a black gold, that's dead black on the surface."

She nodded.

"The garage man found these. When Ortley drove off something spilled from his pockets when he took out the money to pay his bill. The garage man found these on the dirt floor."

I shook my head.

"No. This couldn't be what Sid discovered. This is a placer deposit. If he found something that needed capital, it would have been quartz. A deposit of this sort of gold could be washed out without requiring enough capital to bother about. A man all by himself could make the claim pay its way."

She stamped her foot.

"I tell you I *know*. I don't know what the explanation is. That's what I'm going in to find out. But I know that this is from Sid's mine. And Ortley insisted on taking his clothes, his shaving things and his tooth brush and paste in a leather hand bag."

I nodded.

"Yeah. I saw that. I saw him bring the hand bag out, too, and put it in the car. That don't prove anything."

"The dickens it doesn't!" she snapped. "When they unpacked the burros, they found all of his personal things wrapped in a canvas. So what was in that bag when he brought it out?"

I did some fast thinking and remembered how he'd cut that bag loose from the pack and put it in the car before he did any talking, and I remembered how heavy the bag seemed.

"You win," I told the red-head. "Can you be ready to leave by tomorrow morning?"

The smile that twisted her lips was a funny one.

"Want to get drunk, Bob Zane?" she asked.

"No; why?"

"I wondered why you wanted to stay in town to-night."

"Lord, I don't want to stay. But we've got to get a couple more burros and some grub and some water cans."

"I've got them all. How long will it take for you to put the packs on?"

"About forty-five minutes, for the first packing."

"Then we can leave in an hour."

IT was settled, just like that. We left in exactly fifty-seven minutes. And

I did something I haven't done in the desert for a long time—I strapped my old forty-five onto my waist and got a box of fresh shells.

You get acquainted with people quick in the desert. They can't fool themselves and they can't fool you, out where there's nothing but eternity and silence. I never found out why it is, but it's so. Take a two-day trip in the desert with some one and you'll know him like a book, no matter if he doesn't say a thing.

We traveled late the first night, and we rolled our blankets under the stars. I made the girl as comfortable as I could, and then I went up the ridge a hundred yards or so, so she wouldn't feel I was intruding. I've acted as guide, off and on, for lots of women parties, and the first night they usually sleep with a gun clenched in their fist.

Funny thing about people. They'll sleep in a Pullman car with nothing between them and a lot of strangers but a little green cloth with some numbers on it; but when you get 'em out in God's outdoors they're likely to get self-conscious.

Not this girl.

She was one of the kind that was sure of herself, and of every move she made. She had the poise of a thoroughbred, and she took to the desert like a duck to water.

People are like that. They either take to the desert or they don't. They either love it or they hate it, and if they hate it, the hatred is born of fear.

That night a faint breeze sprang up out of nowhere. The stars blazed

steadily. The sage leaves commenced to rustle against each other, and then the sand began to whisper. I went to sleep with the sand making little whispering noises that sounded more and more like words.

In the morning she was up, waiting for me, which I hadn't expected. It was early. The desert was cold with a dry cold that penetrated. There was just the faintest streak of dawn in the east. The stars hadn't commenced to pin-point out before the day. They were still blazing steadily.

She threw some sage branches on the fire and the red flared up over the desert.

"Go get the burros," she said. "I can get the breakfast."

She was like a great shadow, moving between me and the fire.

"No fancy stuff," I warned. "Coffee and something we can handle quick. We've got to get started before it gets too hot."

She clattered the pans about and I could hear the gurgle of water from a canteen. I rounded up the burros, put on the saddles, and heard the beat of a spoon against a pan.

It was a good breakfast, and it came up on the dot.

"One cup of water for dishwater," I told her.

"No more than that?"

"No. You've got to get accustomed to the desert, and you might as well begin."

She didn't argue. She just measured out a cup of water and poured it in the frying pan. Fifteen minutes later we were throwing the last rope on the pack, and she knew a lot about the squaw hitch.

The east was a red gold now, the color of the gold that had fallen from Ortley's pocket, the color of blood-

stained gold. She watched it as the burros shuffled their way through the sage and greasewood clumps.

"I heard whispers last night," she said.

"Sand," I told her.

She said nothing.

CHAPTER IV.

TRAIL'S END.

THE red faded from the east. The golden light was so strong it hurt the eyes. Purple shadows began to form and long streamers of light tinged the high points. Then the sun fairly jumped over the horizon, and it was hot.

It was a typical desert day. By eight o'clock the mountains began to shimmer. By ten, there were mirages playing tag with us. By eleven, the place was a furnace with no shade. I knew of a clump of mesquite, and I made it a little before noon.

The girl's face was red, her eyes were inflamed, and her lips were cracked, but she managed a grin. I slung off the packs and loosened the saddles. The shade was welcome, and there was a little breeze. Fierce desert flies came and nipped at us, danced in front of our eyes, buzzed in our ears, crawled on our moist skin.

I was accustomed to it, and I slept. The girl couldn't sleep. I knew she was tossing on her blanket, fighting flies, trying to shut the torture of the sun out from her eyes.

By three o'clock I slung on the saddles and we started again. The horizons were still dancing. Then the purple shadows crept stealthily out from the high ranges. The sage cast long shadows. The horizons quit jumping about, the mirages vanished

and cool fingers of soothing wind reached out over the sandy wastes.

"Here is where he's buried," I said.

She got from her burro. I showed her the grave, and then I went on for a hundred yards or so with the burros and left her there. She came up in about fifteen minutes.

"Do we camp here?"

I shook my head. "I found where they spent a night. I think it was the last night they had together. We'll camp there. We can make it by dark."

I crowded the burros, and we made it by dark. It had been a long, hard day. Most women would have had hysterics, but this red-headed campaigner wanted to cook the supper.

I parked her off to one side and made lots of hot tea and opened some of the canned delicacies I'd brought.

She drank the canned tomatoes eagerly and smiled at me with tired eyes. She ate some of the canned vegetables, nibbled at the toast, nodded her head, stiffened, took some more tea, nodded again and fell asleep.

I took the plate from her nerveless fingers and eased her back on the blanket, put another blanket under her head for a pillow. She never stirred.

I took a flash light and looked around.

I'd seen it all before. There was a cliff that stretched up from the desert, hollowed by wind and drifting sand into a million little caves. There was a dry wash, and then the blackened ashes of an old camp fire.

I got the camp made and went to bed.

THE girl slept late in the morning, and I let her sleep. It was sunup before I called her to coffee and bacon. She grinned apologetically, and toyed with the food. The sun was

commencing to do its stuff and the sand radiated the dazzling light.

Perhaps it was the angle of the sun, perhaps it was just because my eyes happened to be looking in that direction, but I saw something I'd overlooked before. It was a little scratch on the side of the cliff, a place where a nailed boot had left two parallel scratches on the surface of the soft rock.

"Do you hear whispers?" she was asking. "When you're out in the desert?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"I heard whispers again last night."

"Sand whispers."

"No, these were words. Some one kept saying something about a letter. I'm very near a letter that was left for me."

I looked at her sharply, but the calm eyes didn't falter.

"Yes," she said, "a letter."

I looked at the scratches made by the boot heel once more.

"I think," I said, "if you'll take a look in the caves up along the face of that cliff, you might find it. I'll take the high ones, you take the low ones. Watch out for snakes."

She didn't argue. She started searching.

I was the one to find the letter. It was up in a high cave. It was addressed to Miss Edith Eason, and the address was the business address in Los Angeles.

I scaled it down to her.

It was something of a shock to her as she saw the sealed envelope, written in the hand of the dead. Coming on top of the whispers she'd been hearing, it must have seemed like a voice from the dead.

Funny thing about those whispers. They'd seemed to be trying to tell me

something during the night. But I was too drowsy to hear well. Once I thought I had a message, but it had slipped my mind when I woke up.

You can't ever tell, though; maybe it was because of those whispers that I looked at those boot marks. Then again, maybe all of this whispering business was just imagination. I'm putting down the facts the way they happened. One's guess is as good as that of another.

After a while she handed me the letter.

There was a lot of personal stuff in there that I hated to read. It seemed like violating a confidence, but I knew I had to read it to get the whole sketch. The thing was just the way I'd commenced to figure.

SIDNEY GRAHAME had located a big, low-grade quartz mine.

He'd interested Harry Ortley into coming in and looking it over. While they were dickering over terms, Ortley wanting to take everything in sight and have a guarantee of ten per cent more, Sid wandered off into the desert and just stumbled onto a rich placer.

He staked it out, and told Ortley he didn't need his finances, that Ortley could have the low-grade if he wanted, and welcome, and then he showed Ortley the placer.

That was where he made his mistake. He knew it before the day was done. They started back. Murder was in Ortley's eyes. Sid knew it. He wrote the letter and hid it in the cave, figuring that if anything happened, desert-wise eyes would back-track Ortley. But he didn't dare make the hiding-place of the letter too obvious for fear Ortley would see it.

There was a map showing the location of the placer.

I looked up from the letter to find the girl's eyes on mine.

"Can we get there to-day?" she asked.

"No. It's two days' travel, and it's twenty miles from the nearest water. It's one of the worst bits of the desert. That's why it's never been prospected more thoroughly. I'd better go and get some witnesses before we go in there."

I looked at her eyes and saw fire in them for the first time.

"That's nonsense. You don't want witnesses. You just want to get me out of the way where I won't see what's going to happen. We'll travel hard and we'll get there to-morrow."

I tried to talk her out of it. As well argue with a granite mountainside. So we started to travel. And we traveled plenty.

The map located the mines with reference to Pilot Butte, and I didn't have any trouble. There was the gleam of a tent in the afternoon sun as we approached the placer.

"You stay behind," I told the girl. She just shook her head.

We rode up on the tent. Fingers of shadows were stretching across the desert.

"Hello, in there!" I yelled.

There was no answer. I got off the burro and went in. My hand was parked around my forty-five as I pulled the tent flap.

The tent was deserted, and it had been vacated in a hurry. It looked as though Ortley had seen us coming in over the desert and taken a sneak to where he could ambush us.

It was a bad break. I hadn't thought Ortley would be that wise, but he was. He'd had the breaks and played them. I went out of the tent knowing what the answer was going to be even before I heard the crack of the rifle.

Sand spurted up at my feet. The second shot gave me his line. He'd made a little fort out of rocks and sand, and had worked it over so it had all the color of the native country.

One man with a forty-five at his belt isn't going to do any good wading into a fort where a man with a high-powered rifle is holding out.

I turned loose a couple of shots just so I wouldn't be taking part in an argument where some one else was doing all the arguing, and I got the girl off her burro and down into a little swale.

By keeping down in the hollows, we managed to work off the property. At dusk I went back and rounded up the burros. I couldn't tell whether he'd intended to kill us or whether he'd merely tried to throw a scare into us. I wished I'd brought a rifle, wished I didn't have the girl along.

CHAPTER V.

DESERT WARFARE.

"WHAT'S the next move?" she asked.

"Keep him from getting out of the country," I said. "He's probably made quite a stake of gold by this time, and he'll either beat it, or else try to bluff it out."

"What will we do?"

"Do you think you could find your way back to the water alone—if you had to?"

She studied my face for a moment or two to find out what the question meant.

"You mean if anything should happen to you, and I'd have to try and get back alone?"

"Yes."

"I'm afraid not. Let's see if we can't keep him where he is without tak-

ing the risk of losing your life. I know enough to know that a man with a revolver isn't any match for a man with a high-powered rifle."

"All right," I told her. "Then the only thing to do is to wait him out."

"How do you mean?"

"While he's on that claim, and has a fort to wait in, and a tent that he'll move on up to the fort under cover of darkness, we haven't got a chance. But the nearest water is at that hole twenty miles away. He hasn't got very much water left. He'll have to go for water, and he'll have to get out of the country."

"We can always follow him, keeping just out of range of his gun. We have the advantage of knowing the desert. And whenever he strikes civilization we'll have him arrested. It ain't the way I'd like to play it. I'd prefer a show-down and taking him in with his hands tied, or else letting him take me in with my feet off the ground, or plant me right here. But we are both witnesses to the finding of that letter, and if anything should happen to me and you couldn't find the water hole, it'd be playing into his hands."

She nodded.

"What do we do, camp?"

"Yes. We camp, and we keep a watch day and night. He'll be up to some treachery when he finds out what we're planning. And we go very, very sparing on the water. We've got to make him run out of water before we do."

We camped that night just as though the desert was full of hostile Indians. What little fire we had was shielded behind blankets, and we put it out as soon as we had boiled the tea water and warmed up the *frijoles*.

I kept watch that night while the girl slept. Once or twice I thought I heard him, trying to find our camp, but I got

down on my stomach where I could sweep my eyes along the sky line, and couldn't see anything moving.

Morning showed he'd moved the tent, just as I'd figured he would. If the girl had been able to find her way out alone, I'd have waited for him by the tent, but we couldn't afford to take any chances. Dying of thirst was too horrible a death to consider for that girl.

I'd made the camp pretty well out of rifle range of the mining claim, and all we had to do was to keep watch during the day. By night I'd make another camp.

HE stuck in his fort all morning. After breakfast I put my head in the shade of a big sage and tried to get caught up on sleep.

It was hot, and the sun beat down on the sand like an oven. The flies came and crawled and nipped, but I managed to get some sleep. I was sore, and my dreams weren't pleasant. I'd underestimated this fellow Ortley with his cold eyes and his efficiency of selfishness. I hadn't figured he'd have left the empty tent to lure me into an ambush; and I didn't figure on his having a fort, or knowing the desert well enough to play a lone hand and get by.

Evidently he was one of those mathematical thinkers who figure out every move in the games they play. He must have studied the desert, and had some one show him most of the simple tricks of packing.

The girl was keeping guard, and she must be getting a full dose of desert. I'd rigged up a little shade for her. And I'd dug a trench we could get into at sign of any danger.

It was about four o'clock when she called me.

"He's coming," she said.

I snapped wide awake, saw the black blob of motion that was moving slowly over the glittering sand. He had both hands up in the air, and he was carrying a white rag, waving it wildly.

I didn't trust him somehow or other.

"Get down in the ditch and flatten out," I told the girl. I waited, standing in plain sight, but my hands were pretty well placed for sudden action.

It was when he was within about a hundred yards, nice rifle range, but a little uncertain revolver range, that he dropped the white flag. I saw then how damned clever he was. He'd tied his rifle between his shoulders so it hung down behind his back. And he only had to whirl around, catch the muzzle, jerk the weapon around, and there he was, ready for action.

It was a clever trick, even for an old desert fighter. For a city dweller to think it out showed the type of mind that had thought of the fort, of the ambush. If it hadn't been for the ditch I had dug, it would have been almost certain death for us.

I jerked the revolver from its holster, and showed him some speed. That was one place where I could claim the advantage. He might have a coldly efficient mind, but he didn't know how quickly a man in the desert could get his gun from its holster.

My first shot was just a trifle high and to the right. It actually nicked through the top of his shoulder. I saw the dust fly from the shirt, and I heard the little *tick* that the bullet gave.

Then the rifle cracked spitefully, and a high velocity bullet fanned my cheek.

I dropped down into the trench I had dug, and Ortley flattened on the desert.

I tried waving my hat on a stick.

He didn't even fire. His coldly efficient mind had told him that I

wouldn't wear my hat after I dropped into the ditch.

I stuffed some sand in a handkerchief, and made it look a little like the top of a man's head. I moved that slowly along the top of the little trench, and he fired.

I jumped up with the sound of the shot. He was reloading his gun, a mere jerking of a lever; but it gave me time for a snap shot.

The shot missed—for the simple reason that there wasn't enough target to shoot at at the distance. He'd carried a short-handled trowel with him, and he'd thrown up a little embankment of sand, and hollowed out a ditch.

I KNEW then I was up against a man who overlooked nothing. Those cold, scornful eyes, utterly emotionless, were windows for a brain that moved with ball-bearing efficiency.

I dropped back into the trench and looked for the handkerchief. It was filled with little holes. I knew that those holes had been made by spattering sand. The high velocity bullet had hit close enough to its mark to send little gravel particles spattering up in a spitting shower.

It was good shooting. Probably Ortley, with that damned efficiency of his, had been practicing on his rifle shooting, waiting for the time which he felt might possibly come.

My respect for the man mounted as my hatred increased.

The rifle cracked again. I flattened in the trench. There sounded the unmistakable *thunk!* of a bullet plowing into solid meat. I looked at the girl anxiously. She was well down, and there was no sign of a hit.

The rifle cracked again. Once more there sounded the impact of a high-powered bullet on something solid.

At the third crack I flung myself up from the trench, revolver ready for a snap shot. As before, I found my man was well covered. But I saw what he was doing. He was shooting our burros!

I dropped down and reloaded my revolver. There was only one thing left to do—charge and fight it out, gun against gun.

But the rifle didn't crack any more—not just then. The damned, efficient devil had figured out what I would do next, and was waiting for me, long-barreled rifle ready to claim an easy victim as I scrambled from the trench. After that, the girl would be easy.

"If anything happens to me," I warned her, "don't waste time being sentimental. Grab my gun and wait. Get him if you get a chance. If you don't get the chance—well, don't let him get you."

She nodded.

I didn't go into details. I knew the man by this time. A death of thirst in the desert is a horrible thing.

Minutes passed and there was no sound. Then there came the crack of the rifle. This time it was far to the right. I jumped up. I might as well have stayed where I was. He was out of revolver shot, anyway. And he was killing our burros with a methodical calmness, an unhurried efficiency that was like the man.

The girl didn't appreciate the situation for a minute.

"We've driven him off!" she said, and her voice was triumphant.

I started rolling up some food in a shoulder pack.

"Yes," I told her, "he's moved."

My words were punctuated by another shot. The last shot came a few minutes later. Every one of our burros was buzzard bait. And the

desert seemed to reach out clutching fingers for us.

Ortley walked back toward his fort. He didn't even look our way. That's how sure of himself and his strategy he was.

And he had good reason to be. Out there in the desert we were going to have to get the breaks if we won through. Ortley had burros and he had a high power rifle to protect the burros. We had nothing except provisions and water. Neither of those would last.

The desert became purple with a short twilight, and then darkness came like a cool mantle.

"How good are you at walking?" I asked the girl.

"Do we walk?"

"We do."

I rolled the shoulder pack as tight as I could get it, and took all the water I dared to carry. I made the woman travel light. We started out before it had been dark an hour.

Twenty miles is only a hop, skip, and a jump in an automobile. It's a fair ride on horseback. It's a good ride on a burro. On foot it isn't so bad if a man's accustomed to walking. But twenty miles in a burning desert with loose sand underfoot and a woman...

CHAPTER VI.

THE WEAPON OF DESERT KNOWLEDGE.

WE made the first five miles fairly easily. The girl was getting tired then. I was sweating under my shoulder pack. I gave her a little water and a ten-minute rest, and then we plugged on.

About one o'clock she asked me the question I'd been expecting to hear long before.

"Why are we running away?"

"Because Ortley holds all the trump cards. He's got a killing radius with a rifle that beats what we have with a revolver. He's got shade and shelter. He's got transportation. There's only one chance we've got. That's to beat him to water and then be able to wait him out."

"What do you mean by 'wait him out'?"

"I'll show you, when we get to water."

We plugged along for another hour. The girl stumbled once or twice. I made her take off her boots and looked at her feet. They were getting in bad shape. I had a little adhesive tape, and I bound them up as best I could. She lay flat on her back for fifteen minutes. I didn't dare to let her rest long. It was going to be a struggle.

I got her to her feet, and we plugged on. The shoulder pack was rubbing pretty badly. I'd had to take stuff that would carry and didn't have the chance to arrange it so it'd ride best. There were too many bulky objects, too little blanket.

Daylight saw us two miles from the water and the girl looked pretty white in the morning light. I began to drive her unmercifully. I taunted her with being a weakling. I told her Ortley was too smart for her, that she was too soft for the desert, that she was a drag. I told her lots of things that made me squirm as I said them, but it was the only way.

She didn't have spirit enough to reply. Her white face remained expressionless. Her calm eyes were paled with fatigue. Her feet moved as though her boots were made of lead.

And it began to get hot.

I'd gone strong on the water with her when I saw we could probably

make it. We didn't really run out until the last mile.

A mile doesn't seem very far. But let me tell you that last mile was a torture, every step of it. The sun was beating down on us. The girl's feet were gone. I was carrying an awkward pack. We'd made twenty honest miles of sand and fine rock, twenty desert miles of up and down, and we'd crossed one ridge that went up two thousand feet above the rest of the desert, and it went up straight. The climb up that slope had been heartbreaking.

The girl's boots were typical department store boots of the type that are manufactured for women who want to look well in hiking clothes. They're all right for riding, but for walking they're a different thing. And a woman's feet aren't built for heavy boots.

I tried to do some more taping. But the skin had gone completely soft. It was like wet tissue paper. She was staggering and wincing, moaning, biting her lip, gasping irregular breaths.

We got to the water hole. She was all in.

I got some wet mud around the fevered feet. I soaked her wrists in cold water and I sopped her forehead. She rolled over and went to sleep. I took the things from the pack and buried the stuff that the sun would hurt. Then I sat there to fight flies and wait.

There was a little shade, some mesquite that wasn't very high or very thick. We had to keep moving around to follow that shade. The flies were bad, and it was one hot day.

SHE woke up around noon, so stiff she could hardly move. I fed her.

"I can never walk out of this desert," she said. "I'm not a quitter, but I just can't do it."

"I know it. I'm not asking you to—yet."

"How else could we get out?"

"Wait."

"Wait for what?"

"For about four or five days."

"Here?"

"Here."

"Why so long?"

"If it happens sooner we're licked."

"What happens?"

"Wait and see."

Five days passed, and I was afraid I'd guessed this Ortley wrong. But on the sixth day, just a little after sun-up, I saw the dots come straggling across the desert. Four burros and a man.

It was about time. The grub I'd taken hadn't been any more than enough. The flies and the heat and the continued inactivity had been awful. The girl had had plenty of water to drink and sop on her skin. I'd been afraid to get myself accustomed to too much water, so I'd kept on my regular desert ration, which was plenty short.

The burros speeded up as they neared the water.

"What now?" she asked. "He's still got the rifle."

I indicated the little trenches I'd dug.

"We can keep out of the line of his fire, no matter where he tries to shoot from."

"But he won't bother with us. He'll keep on going."

"Maybe."

"And our provisions are almost gone."

"It's a show-down now. Either we win or we lose. If we lose you've got to wait here while I walk to Randsburg and get some help. Those provisions will have to last you."

"How about you?"

"I won't bother with provisions. I'll carry water—if I have to go."

The black spots got nearer. We could see the long, dancing shadows cast by the early sun. I got up close to the little embankment I'd thrown up and got the girl placed where she'd be safe.

Ten minutes more and I could hear the crunch of their feet in the sand. When they were within about forty yards I slipped my forty-five forward and took a peek.

It was as I'd thought. Ortley had figured out what the embankments meant. He was behind a burro, his rifle ready. At the flicker of motion I made when I raised up, he fired.

I dropped back and called to him.

"Better surrender, Ortley. You were so confident we'd left, and so damned greedy, that you waited until you'd milked the last ounce of gold from the claim, and that means you're short of water. We can hold the water hole."

His language was worse than strong. And I could hear the thick tone of his voice which told me what I'd surmised. He was out of water—had been for a few miles at least. Ortley was gold-mad, and he'd stayed on to work as much out of the claim as he could. The burros were weighted down with his plunder. He'd postponed the trip for water until the very last minute that he dared, knowing he wouldn't dare to return to the claim—not until he heard what had happened to us.

HE walked around the water hole, shooting from time to time, trying to find a weak point in our defense. There wasn't any.

The burros got restive and tried to walk in. He tied them together and kept herding them out of range. I'd have shot his burros and left him in a trap, only we'd have been caught in the same trap.

Ortley had been a thinking machine, but he hadn't known the desert long enough. The desert gives its hoard to those who know her. In the desert, knowledge counts. Ortley didn't realize his position even now.

It was nearly noon before he knew what he was up against. He went almost delirious with rage. He would have charged the spring, only he knew it would be sure death. I'd have shown him no mercy, none whatever.

Finally he knew the alternative.

"Damn you! I'll win my way out. You can stay here and starve!"

I looked up after a while. He was plugging his way toward the next water, Bitter Springs. I sighed and smiled at the girl.

"Well, that's that."

"But he's gone with all the gold, and he has the burros and the grub—and everything."

I nodded.

"That's true. But he's cruel, this Ortley, and he's undoubtedly been cutting down on the water he's given his animals. You wait—and see what happens."

His first trouble came when he was less than a mile away. The thirsty burros, knowing they were being taken away from water, balked. He was cruel, this Ortley, and he got the train to moving again. It took work, and blows, and spurs, and cruelty.

I waited.

The burros became dots, finally vanished. They were making almost no time at all. The afternoon breeze sprang up. The long shadows marched across the desert.

There was the sound of hoofs, and here they came, four burros, on the trot, eager for water.

I caught them as they drank, filled up the water canteens.

"Let's go," I told the girl. "He may not be far behind."

As soon as the burros had plenty of water I took them off a couple of miles in the desert and let them feed a bit. Then I started them toward Randsburg.

We traveled until one o'clock. Then we made a short camp and were on our way again at daybreak.

"How about Ortley?"

"He'll either get back to the springs, in which event he'll be there, waiting for the sheriff—or I'll find him somewhere else, when I come back with a posse."

She didn't get it all figured out, but she didn't ask any questions, not after that.

WE got to Randsburg, and I told my story. The packs of the burros were weighted down with gold. It was a blood-red gold, alluvial, in coarse chunks and colors that ran very thick and big. All the gold had the same reddish coating.

The sheriff came, and we started out.

We went to the water hole first, figuring Ortley would have found his way back there, and been trapped.

He wasn't there. So we started looking through binoculars at the horizon. We spotted the circling dots of buzzards and went to the point under which they circled.

I was glad the girl wasn't with me.

But I wished that expert doctor, who had testified that people dying of thirst didn't dig the flesh away from their fingers, had been there. The doctor's testimony had saved Ortley once. Now what was left of Ortley would have refuted the doctor.

He had been cruel. He had murdered. He had stolen the claim of a partner. But he had been punished.

The desert is rather thorough in such matters, and it will be a long time before I forget the sight of those hands.

But sometimes I think the desert's cruelty is one of its best features. There's too much mercy in connection with man-made justice. After all, an immutable law that never varies is the one that gets the respect.

But that's the desert. It's a wonderful mother, and a cruel one. And the cruelty teaches self-reliance, and self-reliance is pretty nearly the object of life, after all.

But that's what makes the desert whisper to itself at night when the sand begins to blow; it's trying to pass on the stories of Ortley and his kind.

Every time I pillow my head on the sand, and listen to the little whispers that slither across the floor of the desert, I wonder how many more stories

there are, stories like the story of the red gold, of Ortley, of the girl with the calm eyes, of the lunger who died of some mysterious cause.

There are lots of them, and the sand is trying to tell them, whispering the news to the cactus as it drifts by, telling the stories to the other sands. And then, finally, as the breeze freshens, the other sands stir to life and repeat the stories they have heard, until the desert becomes just a great bowl of whispers.

That's what the sand has to tell the sand as it drifts by. That's why the sand whispers seem more than sand whispers—just before you drop off to sleep of nights. The stars blaze steadily down, telling of faith, and of fair dealing, and of upright manhood. And the desert, by way of warning, whispers the stories of Ortley and his kind.

THE END.



Food and Clothing for Castaways

DOTTING the surface of the waters far to the south of the Indian Ocean (in latitude forty degrees) are numerous tiny islands where the various nations of the world have made provision for mariners unfortunate enough to be cast away. Most of these isles are great distances from liner tracks, but disabled vessels not infrequently drift onto their shores. As these islands are the results of volcanic eruptions, there is not a trace of vegetation upon them. Hence in days past, castaways drifting to these lonely shores were more often than not faced with starvation. To-day they will find a signboard, printed in French, which reads: "Food and Clothing for Castaways." The board is shaped like a hand and the index finger points in the general direction of a small stone hut. Inside are to be found woolen shirts, blankets, matches, dried beef, biscuits and other plain edibles. These stores are kept in wooden barrels which are air-tight but easy to open.

When these island storehouses were first opened they were the prey of marauders. To-day most of them are in charge of a keeper whose job is to see they are not looted, and to lend aid and render help to genuine castaways. Although these jobs would appear to be the loneliest in existence, there is little difficulty in securing men.

William David Belbeck.



Foul blows sounded shockingly loud in the room

Gambler's Throw

Somewhere in the tropics, a racketeering genius had hidden a group of kidnaped millionaires; a girl was the lodestone that drew aviator Jerry Calhoun and his two allies

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

Author of "Old Safety-First," "Fools Rush In," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JERRY CALHOUN is riding with the beautiful young actress, Nancy Wentworth, fiancée of a millionaire, when their car is stopped by gangsters and she is kidnaped. It is part of a wholesale plot by which the unknown racketeers collect a large sum from various abducted millionaires as "board money."

Jerry, with his rich war-time buddy, Emory Battles, and the Federal detective Stevens, determine to follow the bandits, who flew south along the Atlantic Coast when last seen.

On their tropical island, Nancy Wentworth has her difficulties repulsing the advances of the bored, heat-exasperated, impatient millionaires and

This story began in the Argosy for September 13.

the kidnaped gangster One-shot Lucci, who are her fellow prisoners.

CHAPTER VII.

A FRESH TRAIL.

NOT since the spy scares during the World War had such a general feeling of distrust pervaded the country as that which followed the bold raid of the kidnapers in Chicago. Persons of wealth dared scarcely leave their homes.

Mobsters from the underworld enjoyed an unexpected period of easy prosperity acting as bodyguards for rich men and women who were forced to venture out of the security of their homes. But even this protection did not allay the fears of those who surrounded themselves with armed plug-uglies, for had not the formidable One-shot Lucci been snatched away from two of the most dangerous gunmen-bodyguards to be found in the country?

Newspapers blossomed with scare-heads reporting the latest vague pronouncements of the police which, when analyzed, revealed that the officials knew nothing and were at their wits' end. Thousands of permits to carry weapons were issued to people supposed to be of good repute. Crimes of all kinds, particularly those accompanied by shootings, multiplied in direct proportion to the number of permits issued.

The deadly accuracy and unfailing success of the kidnapers' raids was the underlying cause of the public's fear. Six prominent people had been spirited away, the police hadn't a single clew.

Every airplane manufacturing plant in the United States was visited by police, who checked the name of every recent purchaser of an amphibian or a

flying boat. Work of checking the re-sales of such craft was proceeding apace, but, since aviators are notably a migratory lot, months would be needed to complete the work.

Attorneys of most recent captives, two Chicago millionaires, took the Twentieth Century Limited for New York, accompanied by a shrewd little Jew, reputedly the cleverest criminal lawyer in the United States, who represented One-shot Lucci.

After a lengthy conference with the firm of Hammond, Smythe, Whittelsey, Van Ashforth and Hammond, who represented the first group of victims, the reward fund was increased to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for each person rescued from captivity, together with two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to the person or persons causing the arrest and conviction of the leader of the kidnaping band.

Newspaper reporters who, as before, waited in the reception room for news of the meeting, came away with the unconfirmed report that Sol Levinson, One-shot's lawyer, had almost broken up the meeting by offering a wager of five to one, in thousands, that his client's friends would toss the chief kidnaper's body on the steps of the City Hall before the police made their first worth-while arrest.

An undenied rumor was published in the press, stating that a score of wealthy men had underwritten a huge fund to be used in retaining the services of the two largest private detective agencies in the country, to work independently of each other and the police.

On Saturday, the 15th, it was announced that a demand had been made upon the friends and relatives of the Chicago victims for a "board bill" of one hundred thousand dollars each, to

be placed in a rowboat anchored on Lake Michigan exactly twelve miles east of the Great Lakes Naval Training Station.

Specific mention was made, in the demand, that watch would be set for aircraft or surface vessels, and warning was given that if a trap were set on Lake Michigan similar to that attempted off Montauk Point, no effort would be made to take the money, but that the prisoners would bear the brunt of retaliation.

As before, the notes were written and inclosed in nondescript stationery, but were on this occasion mailed from a box in Chicago's populous Loop. There were no finger-prints nor any other traceable clews.

AT nine o'clock the following Wednesday morning a large monoplane zoomed off an uneven field of stubble on the outskirts of Milwaukee and flew southward at amazing speed.

When it turned out over the lake at Waukegan its altitude was such as to render it almost invisible from the ground. Now and then a keen-eyed observer might have glimpsed a tiny, silvery flash as the sunlight was reflected from its aluminum-colored wing and fuselage. But the observer must have been possessed of 20-20 vision, and, moreover, he must have been trained in the duty of watching for aircraft.

Twenty-one thousand feet above the vast expanse of inland sea, three men were comfortably seated in a warm, inclosed cabin. Jerry, at the joystick, swung over lake and shoreline in a series of immense, concentric circles. He was happier at this moment than he had been since he could remember. The uneven, pulsing drone of the marvelous new 525-horsepower radial

motor was sweeter to his ears than the most exquisite harmonies of a symphony. She felt to his appreciative senses like a scout plane, so sweetly did she answer the slightest pressure on stick and pedal. Even now, throttled down as she was, her air speed meter indicated an even one hundred miles an hour.

Emory, his fiery eyes dancing with anticipation, was studying the magnificent panorama below through naval binoculars. Never since he had inherited his grandfather's substantial fortune had the mere ability to spend freely given him such pleasure as now. Battles had purchased the ship out of hand and had equipped her with every latest gadget and gimcrack, that the trio might pursue the chase on better than even terms. It seemed to him that never had he made so wise a purchase. What better use of money than to buy adventure—the heady wine which is so elusive in its delicate aroma as to be unappreciated by the dullards who prefer substantial mahogany desks and ankle-deep carpets to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow?

Adventure! A word, that, to roll on one's tongue. Adventure! The word brought to his mind the flavor of the tropics, exotic, heady bouquets that spurred men on to deeds rather than phrases. He remembered the toast of the old gang in his squadron, the hard-eyed, hard-bitten men who drank bottoms-up to the words, "Anywhere but here."

Aye, life was worth living while adventure was afoot.

STEVENS wiped an ugly little Thompson sub-machine gun with a bit of oily cloth, chewing rhythmically, his faded blue eyes looking at nothing in particular. He had accepted

the airplane as he did everything else, unquestioningly. To him it was just another means of transport. Stevens had admitted that he had flown before, but volunteered no details. He saw no romance or adventure in the task before him. He had long ago ceased to regard adventure as anything more than trouble that a man of sense avoided if he could. Adventure was all right for young lads of high spirits who could still laugh in the face of a machine gun. He, personally, wasn't having any more trouble than his job called for.

He was, he reflected, just a peaceable old feller pretty close to the retiring age. But it seemed that the world was packed full of trouble that these youngsters, now, would call adventure. Funny how some fellers could live a lifetime and have nothing happen to them, while the next one only had to go out of his front door or swing aboard a street car and all hell broke loose.

If he had his life to live over again, he would have chosen a different job; one which didn't call for always being ready to shoot first and hit the bull's eye on the first shot.

That time in Chicago, now; he supposed these two young bucks would have called that adventure—when he had got a little too close to One-shot's trail and they'd tried to Tommy him. He had just happened to notice the little blue snout of the machine gun peeping out of the partly opened second story window of the house he had been rooming in.

Lucky he had happened to notice it. In another couple of steps it would have been fogging away at him. Of course he wouldn't have lived as long as he had if he had not sort of got used to noticing things. He had entered the nearest house, raced up to the roof and

across into his rooming house, and descended to the front room where the boys were still laying for him. At that, he had had to draw his heat and blaze one of them off before he could get the wristers on the other two.

He sighed pensively, seeing himself in a pair of old blue overalls puttering around the California pecan grove that he would buy in another two, three years.

"There she is!" Emory's exulting voice cut through the blurred snarl of the motor. "The same amphibian. Over there!"

Far below, hurtling over the corrugated blue washboard that was Lake Michigan, appeared a tiny airplane, heading straight out from the shore. Jerry throttled his engine, turned and carefully jockeyed the monoplane into its position between the sun and the speeding plane fifteen thousand feet below.

The kidnapers' ship slid down to the water, taxied to a tiny pinpoint of black in the midst of the glittering blue water, then took off again and headed back toward land. The swift monoplane, holding its strategic position with ease, followed the amphibian over the rolling hills which nestled close to the lake shore and across the flat prairies beyond the hills. Miles followed miles until at last those in the fleeing ship turned abruptly toward the south-southeast.

Nearly four miles in the air, the three in the monoplane watched the toy-like lake front suburbs slide smoothly beneath their silvery wing. The far-flung, sprawling city of Chicago, scarcely visible through the smoke smudge from its million chimneys, was left far astern. The amphibian began to climb, so Jerry urged his ship up and up until the chill of the

thin air began to creep through invisible crevices in the cabin structure.

"I have a hunch," he announced, "that we're in for a long hop. That fellow down there is sticking to a course that's as straight as a plumb line. We may as well settle down. Emory, take the wheel while I stretch my legs."

CHAPTER VIII.

BACK TO THE SAVAGE.

THEODORE P. HAMILTON capped the black deuce with the red ace, deftly swept the cards into a pack and began to shuffle. He glanced idly about the room and, catching the saturnine eye of the half-drunk Mallory, nodded pleasantly.

It was little short of amazing, the solitaire player mused, how quickly Mallory had broken. Half-back on the county polo team, a golfer and tennis star of considerable note, the man had gone completely to pieces under the strain of nearly three weeks of enforced idleness on this heat-encompassed tropic isle. Liquor, mental stress, the heat and the constant presence of a beautiful woman had almost done for him.

The president of the United States Textile Corporation considered the problem and decided that unless they were freed before long, some one would have to kill Mallory.

He was startled by his own thoughts. Three weeks ago he would have viewed the murder of a fellow-citizen with horror. Now he found himself judging the man and looking upon his possible taking-off abstractly, without concern. He knew that he would be able to look upon the body of the man with little regret.

Williams, too, he could do without. Always interrupting his solitaire, the fellow was, with his blither about Chicago and the grain market. Hamilton's business had often called him to Chicago, and upon each visit, confirmed New Yorker that he was, he had liked the great city on the lake less. Smoke, wind, dun-colored buildings of the pre-Cleveland era with an occasional gleaming terra-cotta skyscraper to call attention to the contrasting dinginess of everything else. Wind; and when it blew from the west, stinks from the stockyards. Loud, objectionable persons who slapped one on the back and called one by the first name immediately after being introduced.

No, he did not like Chicago and he wished Williams might be stricken dumb. He wondered if Williams knew how he hated him. If this soul-destroying tension was not lessened, he, Hamilton, might be driven to do something about it. He carefully placed a red seven upon a black eight.

Martin, now. His silence and moroseness were almost as irritating as Williams's garrulity. Extremes, amid all this heat, were bad. If only the man's eyes did not swivel around the room so, as he sat in a corner! Those eyes distracted Hamilton's attention from his games and caused him to make silly blunders, such as placing one red over another. He wondered if Martin would stop looking like that if one asked him to desist. Or would he just sit there in stony silence and stare? Hamilton stole a glance at Martin and felt his nerve-ends prickle. Yes, still staring.

The girl was a plucky one. Not his type, particularly, but he was conscious of a distinct admiration for the way she was holding her own against the

weather and the men who sat about her like beady-eyed buzzards.

Strangely enough, Hamilton did not resent Lucci. Of all the men on the heat-raddled island, Lucci was alone in remaining true to type. He looked, thought, talked and acted like One-shot Lucci, gangster chief.

HAMILTON had been gratified when, that evening at dinner, he had discovered that the Italian, too, was in love with the girl Nancy. That bit of drama had been too much to hope for. She had handled the other love-struck fools with consummate ease. Lucci would be steel to her flint. Hamilton could watch the sparks fly with appreciative eyes. It would help to pass the time away and, perhaps, take his mind away from the heat and from Williams's talk of Chicago and from Martin's staring eyes.

He had liked the way Lucci had parried Nancy's look of scorn when the gangster had informed the entire assemblage that the girl would henceforth be regarded as his, on pain of instant and brutal punishment. Mallory had gulped greedily at his champagne. Williams had flushed furtively. Martin had looked at Lucci with eyes like those of a rattlesnake. He, Hamilton, had applauded with a sardonic, "Hear, hear!"

Yes, little fear of going mad with all these to watch. He shuffled the pack and dealt the cards into a meticulously straight line. It occurred to him that he was already, perhaps, a little mad. Well, it didn't matter. The others were mad, too.

He wondered why their captors had allowed things to come to such a pass. Suave, impersonal house servants; ugly impersonal guards. Excellent foods, wines and liquors. Well-chosen

wardrobes at the disposal of the "guests" who had come ill-prepared for an extended stay.

The rooms were comfortable enough in this rambling, one story structure which had so apparently been erected for the very purpose for which it was being used. The staff must have been given explicit orders to allow the "guests" to do as they chose, so long as no opportunity was given them to escape. Hamilton hazarded a guess that the guards would not even interfere in a fight—or a murder. Well, he would soon know. He looked at his watch. Only eight o'clock. God, how long the evenings were! No use going to bed yet, to toss for hours on end in the heat which closed in on one like a down puff.

Through the open windows came the buzzing hum of an airplane motor. Mallory finished his highball at a gulp and went out into the hot night. Williams tossed aside a three-weeks old copy of the *Chicago Tribune* and followed him. Martin remained in his chair, silent, moody. Hamilton found his game blocked and dealt a new hand. He could hear the girl's clear, vibrant contralto from the porch. The deep, resonant rumble in response would be Lucci.

The sound of the motor's hum changed to an uneven popping. Wind could be heard sighing through wires and struts. After an interval the engine roared again. Hamilton knew that the plane had landed on the inlet and was taxiing to its hangar.

Those who had watched the descending airplane from the porch returned to the room, hoping that with the return of the ship something might occur to break the monotony.

They were accustomed to frequent short flights when the amphibian de-

parted upon brief shopping expeditions; but the last time it had been absent for more than twelve hours, it had returned to add the Chicagoans, Lucci, Martin, and Williams, to the trio of bored New Yorkers who had been the sole guests of the large house. Now it was returning from a three-day trip. Perhaps other victims would join the group.

Nervous, staccato conversation eddied back and forth. Strained, tight voices. How silly! Why didn't they all scream and curse and fight? Hamilton's long, slender fingers caressed a card as though they were testing a bit of fabric by sense of touch.

A STRANGE figure entered the room, that of a tall, thin man who limped painfully with the aid of a heavy stick. As he stood in the doorway, glancing about, Hamilton took him to be an elderly man, sixty or sixty-five years of age, perhaps. Upon second glance, he noted that the pale, bright-eyed face beneath the snow-white hair was that of a young man who could scarcely be more than thirty.

"Good evening, One-shot." The pale, old-young man smiled as he bowed to the lowering gangster. "You have no idea how pleased I was to know that you had joined our delightful little house party."

His eyes flickered over the others, finally coming to rest upon the girl, who stood beside the center table. "Miss Wentworth, my apologies. It is an unpardonable breach of etiquette for a host to absent himself while his guests are visiting. I assure you that it was unavoidable. There are many business affairs connected with such a party."

"Aren't you 'Limpy' Ashwood?"

Lucci's voice broke the momentary silence like the clang of a Chinese gong. The stranger hobbled into the light. Hamilton noted that his left leg was three or four inches shorter than the right. His left shoe had an enormously thick sole which enabled him to walk without crutches.

"I see we need no introductions, you and I," observed the cripple blandly.

"When are you going to turn us loose?" the Italian demanded bluntly.

"Don't tell me that you are bored already, Lucci," protested Ashwood. "If my staff have been negligent, I'll give them notice immediately." He turned toward the girl solicitously. "I'm sorry that I couldn't invite a chaperon, Miss Wentworth, but I'm sure that the impeccable respectability of your married companions, here, has served equally well."

He beamed at the uneasy men. Hamilton wondered how much he knew.

"Why are we here?" inquired the girl shortly.

"Miss Wentworth! Are you not enjoying yourself?"

She decided that if this very strange man did not wish to answer questions, he was well equipped to parry them and little would be gained by prodding him. So she subsided.

Lucci had risen from his chair and was walking over to the slender cripple. His robust, vigorous health contrasted oddly with the meager form, the pale, lined face and the prematurely white hair of the other. Only in the expression of their eyes had they anything in common. That, she thought, was strange, for Ashwood's eyes were blue, Lucci's brown. Still, there was something.

"I've heard all about you, Limpy," stated the Italian, looking the other

over from white hair to crippled foot. "I've been anxious to meet a dude who's supposed to run a racket for the fun of it. So you're Limpy Ashwood, eh? Well, you got brains and nerve, anyway, I'll hand that much to you. We'll either be damn' good friends or one or the other of us will get a spade full of dirt in the face before many months, now."

"So?" Ashwood turned away and settled himself in a chair, then looked up at the aggressive figure towering over him with every sign of amused interest.

"Yeah, that's so," returned Lucci. "Now we all want to know what this racket here is all about. It's a shake-down, of course. All right. But why are we still here? Wouldn't our people kick in, or did the bulls get hot on you so you had to lam away?"

"Neither one, Lucci," replied Ashwood, patiently. "Your friends and relatives have all paid your current board bill very generously. I am now the proud and happy possessor of some six hundred thousand dollars more than I had a short time ago, and that pays your bill in full for another ten days or two weeks. They were most generous, I assure you."

LUCCI whistled softly and looked down at the cripple with something like admiration.

"Sa-ay, you chiseled us right, didn't you? Well, isn't six hundred grand enough? Why don't you let us loose?"

"My dear fellow, it's all very simple." Ashwood was beginning to look bored with the discussion. "In the first place, I'm mentally lazy and if I should allow you to depart now, I should have to think up another good plan to keep myself and my loyal retainers in funds. In the second place,

my abnormal curiosity has been aroused. It has come to my ears that some of you have become—what shall I say?—elemental. That is a psychological experiment that will be absorbing to watch in its development. If you go now, I should be denied that pleasure. So that," he concluded, waving his hand airily, "explains everything. What could be simpler?"

"So that's your idea of a good time, is it?" Mallory broke abruptly into the discussion. Something in the timbre of the broker-sportsman's voice caused Hamilton to put his cards down and to regard the tense, ugly New Yorker with unfeigned interest.

The conversation between Ashwood and Lucci had goaded the brooding man into a state bordering upon frenzy. His muscular, athletic figure was leaning forward in his chair, every muscle taut. His face was suddenly drained of all color. Ashwood was about to answer him carelessly but, glancing at him, he stopped and looked at him with the undisguised curiosity of a scientist watching a bug doing unexpected maneuvers.

"Shut up, you!" Lucci faced Mallory, snarling. "I'm doing the talking, see?"

It appeared to the watching Hamilton that the Italian deliberately added fuel to the all-consuming flame of Mallory's sudden anger. The stock-broker made a mighty effort to hold himself in leash. The card player could see the muscles under his mighty thighs tremble under the strain of his suppressed anger. The eyes of the cripple were upon him, too, seeming to probe into the maddened man's very mind.

"Is this the gentleman who has been cave-manning Miss Wentworth?" asked Ashwood carelessly.

"Yeah," sneered Lucci. "I had to slap him down this afternoon. I got a mind to get rid of him now. I'm getting so I can't stand him around, guzzling lickie all the time and sneaking up on Nancy every time my back is turned."

There was a hiss of indrawn breath from the intent watchers as Mallory, casting all restraint aside, leaped. Like the athlete that he was, he dashed like a whirlwind across the floor, his arms bent to punch or to parry.

Lucci, a head shorter, twenty pounds lighter, smiled grimly as though he welcomed this sudden reversion to brute physical action. Victor in many a bar-room brawl, he had no illusions as to fair or foul play. To fight was to fight to win. He reached instinctively for his hip, but drew his hand away empty.

Quick as light he pivoted on his left foot, swayed his body far away from the onrushing Mallory and lashed out with a sidelong kick that was as swift and as deadly as the stroke of an enraged cobra.

Mallory twisted his body, caught the terrific blow on the hip and thus saved his life, for had that kick landed full on its mark, it must have killed him. His onward momentum caused him to crash hard into the Italian.

They fell to the floor, Mallory on top. His face convulsed with hate, he clutched two handfuls of his enemy's sleek black hair and butted Lucci's head again and again on the floor until it seemed that he would never stop until the other's skull would be gradually beaten to a pulp.

Nancy Wentworth gazed wide-eyed at the frenzied pair, unable to look away, so great was the horror of what she saw. The dull, hollow blows as the dark head rose and fell seemed to echo

against her own body, yet she could neither move nor cry out.

She saw, out of the corner of her eyes, Williams rise from his chair as though to interfere, then saw him relax again as he looked into an automatic in the slender hands of the white-haired cripple. The latter then laid his gun in his lap and watched the cave-man struggle with shining eyes in undisguised pleasure.

THE Italian must have died had those fearful blows on his skull continued, but in the frenzy of despair, he squirmed convulsively until he had partially dislodged Mallory from his stomach. Then, suddenly, he had rolled over, scrambled around until he, in turn, was uppermost.

Perched like a drunken jockey upon Mallory's back, Lucci reached two clawing hands beneath the other's face and searched with tearing fingernails for his eyes. Mallory reared like a plunging horse, throwing himself back and over, so that for a moment both men lay on their backs, the Italian underneath.

For a brief instant they broke apart and crouched there on hands and knees, facing each other with expressions that Nancy had never dreamed the human countenance could assume. A bruise the size of an apple disfigured the Italian's forehead; half a dozen deep gashes marked the progress of Lucci's fingernails from Mallory's forehead to chin.

Then, with a leap so swift that it could scarce be followed by the eye, Lucci sprang, at the same time bringing his fist upward from the floor with the full weight of his leap behind the blow. It struck Mallory's chin with a thud that could be heard all over the room.

The stockbroker crashed as though pole-axed. There was a long, hissing sigh from the spectators, who thought the fight had ended. But, miraculously, the prone man rolled over, and opened his eyes; as Lucci leaped to throttle him, he kneed the Italian in the groin. Lucci's belly-deep sob was the only sound to be heard in the room.

It came to Nancy that this was a battle to the death. Mallory, the sleek, suave, polished gentleman of Wall Street and of the country clubs, was now an abysmal beast, gouging and maiming, fighting to kill or be killed.

She knew nothing of boxing, but she knew, nevertheless, that these blows were intended to inflict fatal injury. Yet her wide brown eyes missed no detail of the fight. She was shocked to realize that she had lost all feeling of horror. Those hideous gasps for breath, the shocking sounds of foul blows stirred her blood as she had never known it could be stirred.

Lucci, again on his back, writhing with pain, was trying to squirm from under Mallory, who was beating down on his upturned face with short, chopping blows of both fists. The Italian's face, drenched with blood, was rapidly losing all semblance to that of a human being.

There was a sudden flurry of arms and legs and Lucci had rolled from under Mallory again. He struggled to his hands and knees, then to his feet, where he swayed gently, and steadied himself by sheer force of will. He spat teeth and blood to the polished hardwood floor.

He lunged forward and seized Mallory in a clinch, his left arm encircling his opponent's neck. Then, his face a blood-smeared mask of diabolical savagery, he dug the fingers of his powerful right hand under Mallory's lower

ribs and tried to tear them from his body.

Mallory screamed and threw himself away. The Italian followed, jabbing rigid, prong-like, outstretched fingers for his eyes. The other, off-balance to avoid the spearing fingers, tottered backward and Lucci leaped for his unguarded throat. They went down in a reverberating crash, the Italian clinging to his adversary's throat like a bull terrier to a bone.

Mallory's knees came up in a spasm of pain. His face became mottled, his eyes protruded like those of a gargoyle. His hands beat ineffectually against Lucci's rigid arms as the Italian's thumbs pressed down into his windpipe.

Then his arms and legs began to flutter, rapidly losing strength as the life-giving air was denied his labored lungs. Suddenly he became limp. Lucci held on, oblivious of all the world except that inhuman face before his eyes.

"That's enough!" Ashwood's voice snapped through the silent room like a pistol shot. Lucci held on.

The cripple hobbled across the floor with amazing speed. His face still bore an expression of disinterested enjoyment. A blue-black streak cut an arc through the air as the butt of his heavy automatic crashed down on Lucci's head.

Without a sigh or a groan, the inert, rigid figure slumped down like a bundle of old clothes tossed down across the insensible form of his enemy.

Ashwood turned away negligently, whistled a shrill, bird-like note and said:

"Put them to bed."

Four burly guards, who had materialized out of nowhere, picked up the two unconscious men and bore them

from the room. Then, for the first time in her life, Nancy Wentworth fainted.

CHAPTER IX.

MAN OF MYSTERY.

THE long porch, under the caress of a faint morning trade wind, was almost endurable. Ashwood lounged in a deck chair, smoking a cigarette, idly gazing over the turquoise water while a copy of "Soldiers of Fortune" lay open but forgotten in his lap.

His deep-set blue eyes held an expression of dreamy contentment. If he noticed the quiet man on the beach who watched over a machine gun tripod, he was not interested.

Nancy, very alluring in spite of the drawn expression around her delicately modelled mouth, appeared at the door. Seeing her captor, she hesitated. Ashwood snapped out of his abstraction, rose with surprising grace and bowed.

"Good morning, Miss Wentworth. There's a delightful breeze. Won't you join me?" She looked at him in frank curiosity, then took the chair he had indicated.

"What a strange person you are, Mr. Ashwood," she observed, meditatively. There was a half-mocking light in his eyes as he met her somber gaze.

"How penetrating!"

She flushed at her own *cliché*; she was not usually given to platitudes. He did not push his advantage, lying back in his chair and resuming his indolent watch over sea and sky.

"Mr. Lucci intimated that you and he were rivals in your unusual profession," she ventured, determined to draw him out. He interested her, this

frail man of indeterminate age who looked and spoke like a scholarly sophisticated despite the obvious fact that he was a desperate criminal.

"One-shot is too flattering," he murmured dryly. "It is true, of course, that we both come under the generic term of racketeers, but there is something direct and forceful about Lucci's work that I could never hope to emulate."

Again that mocking gleam flashed from his eyes. "I would be much more successful in my career if I could be more like the worthy One-shot, who is downright, persevering and unimaginative. One of my little foibles is that bootlegging, in itself, does not stimulate me. Nor does traffic in drugs and women. All of which are, of course, highly lucrative business.

"My own efforts, as you may have observed," he continued, offering her a cigarette, "run to more unusual things. This guest house of mine, for instance; you must admit that it offers a marvelous opportunity for profit, as well as a most intriguing laboratory for the study of human psychology. Where else might one have witnessed the elemental struggle which occurred last evening?"

"Mr. Mallory, millionaire amateur sportsman, in a one round contest versus Mr. Lucci, product of Sicilian *Mafia* and graduate of the Chicago school of post-prohibition culture. In the flicker of an eyelash both reverted to the habits of ancestors a thousand generations back. One could write a classic on the subject of that fight alone.

"The effect of the heat and the enforced propinquity, too, offers a study worthy of much consideration. Five carefully selected men and one woman. Out of the lot, only you and Mr. Ham-

ilton appear to have withstood the strain without cracking. Yes, it is very much worth while. My crime is a magnificent success."

The cripple was apparently enjoying his discourse. He selected another cigarette with long, artistic fingers.

"Why did you pick me as one of your subjects?" she inquired curiously. "There are hundreds and hundreds of women who could pay more than I."

"I happened to see your photograph in the rotogravure section of a Sunday newspaper," he explained casually, "just as I was making out my guest list. Beneath it was a caption to the effect that you were engaged to be married to Mr. Macomber, one of America's wealthiest men. I had already read vivid reports of your personal charm and—pardon me—your somewhat unusual personality. Since your *fiancé* established, so to speak, your financial standing, it occurred to me that you would be a welcome addition to our somewhat exclusive little circle."

BUT why did you venture to come down here," she asked, "when you knew we would all be able to identify you in court as soon as we are released?"

"That, my dear Miss Wentworth, was part of my plan. My past criminal efforts have been extraordinarily remunerative, but, being a restless spirit, I am bored with them. This is my last racket, as the worthy Mr. Lucci would term it. It is my masterpiece, you see. When the time comes for me to release you, I shall disappear. My sanctuary awaits me. In it, I have a grand piano, a modern radio and thousands of books, enough to last me until I die. There, comfortable, surrounded

with the things I love, I shall meditate upon these days of roguery, browse contentedly through my library and, perhaps, write a book or two."

He smiled at her, a wide-mouthed, generous smile which contrasted strangely with his words and his actions. She found herself amazed beyond belief at the strange philosophy of this remarkable man. She wondered what he had suffered to give him this warped outlook upon life, but her intuition warned her that it would not be wise to probe too deep.

"Ah, Mr. Lucci," he said, looking over her shoulder, "your presence this morning speaks wonders for your stamina. You'll pardon me, I'm sure, but that diagonal bandage gives your face an uncommonly raffish look. How are the other inmates?"

The Italian, his face crisscrossed with bandages and surgeon's plaster, grinned painfully.

"Crazy as ever, Limpy," he replied thickly. "Mallory's still in bed. Just saw the steward taking him a high ball. Hamilton is back at his damned solitaire. Martin's sitting in a corner saying nothing while Williams tells him what's the difference between May and September wheat."

"How delightful," commented the cripple.

Lucci looked at him in wonder. This was a strange bird. A little potty, maybe, but a racketeer such as gangland had never known before and would never know again.

"Listen, Limpy," he said abruptly, ignoring Nancy's presence, "I don't begrudge you this game one damn bit. You've turned a nice deal and I'll stand my share of the bill. What I want to know is, will you play with me or against me when this is over?"

"I take it that you have a proposi-

tion?" Ashwood's voice held only the vaguest shade of interest.

"You said it. Listen. I control every money-making racket west of the Alleghanies. My muscle men are in on the graft in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, St. Louis and Kansas City. In each of those cities we've organized cleaners and dyers' associations, garagemen's associations, milk-carriers' associations and half a dozen more. My men act as the secretaries of these outfits and I get the dues, see? No dues; no protection. No protection; no business, see? I've got organizers working right now in the East and in another six months there won't be a cleaner and dyer, a garageman or a milk dealer in the United States who isn't kicking in, see? And that ain't half. There are a hundred times as many industries that can be organized.

"There are a few red-hots who are bucking me," he continued earnestly. "Hymie Solwicz, in New York, doesn't want to split, but he will, or his mob'll kick in for flowers and swell limousines for a wake. Phiz Heeney, in Philly, has got the coppers squared, so he thinks he can hold out. We'll give him a ride as soon as I get back to business. A few other porch-climbers are holding out on me, but my gorillas will take care of them.

"I never been able to make out just what your racket is. I know that damn funny things happen every once in a while and when they do I hear talk about Limpy Ashwood. Are you the bird whose mob is bringing in all the diamonds from Antwerp?"

"WHILE a lawyer might object to that as a leading question," smiled Ashwood, "it is flattering, coming from you. I *have* been interested in the tax-free importation

of diamonds and other precious stones on a fairly large scale."

"How'd you get them by the customs?" demanded the other.

"At a prearranged spot off Nantucket Lightship, my man on the steamer dropped them overboard in a metal canister. One hour later the canister erupted a great quantity of chemical smoke. My amphibian, which at that moment was cruising in the vicinity, spotted the smoke and picked up the container. Quite simple, eh?"

The battered gangster stared at him in undisguised admiration.

"How many men you got in your mob?" he inquired.

"Forty-four," replied the cripple carelessly, "scattered here and there around the world."

"That ain't many," stated the other disparagingly. "I got more than five hundred." He stopped and appeared to ponder. Then, as a sudden thought struck him, "Did you put over that big silk express robbery three months ago?"

"My men did," Ashwood admitted. "I did little more than to fly the plane. It happened that my regular pilot was ill."

"Fly the plane?" The Italian seemed puzzled. Then his face cleared in sudden understanding. "Sure—so that's how you made your mysterious get-away! Now listen, Limpy; how about the two of us hooking up? We can make twenty millions apiece in the next year and that ain't boloney, either! Twenty millions, easy!"

The frail figure in the deck chair stirred uneasily. His eyes looked weary and old.

"I'm afraid not, Lucci. I don't want twenty millions. I have enough now. And so have my men. I've shared with them and they'll go their own

way from now on." He looked far into the northern sky, focusing his eyes intently. "Of course," he added, "there's the always-present element of uncertainty which has made this business the stimulating profession it has been. For instance, if I'm not mistaken, there's an airplane up there, the crew of which may have something to say about our future plans."

Nancy and Lucci, following the line of his pointing finger, saw a tiny dot in the distance and, as they watched it, they heard the faint, pulsing drone of its engine. The guard on the beach hastily dismounted his machine gun and carried it beneath the sheltering leaves of a palm. Three men emerged from the combination boathouse and hangar at the edge of the inlet and stared at the approaching plane.

Ashwood alone seemed to be disinterested. He lay back in his chair, smoking quietly, apparently lost in meditation.

The tiny black dot slowly assumed form. A single, silvery wing developed, atop a long, tapering, cylindrical fuselage. Nancy watched it, her heart beating wildly. Could it be that those flyers were searching for her and her companions? For many heart-breaking moments it appeared that the plane's course would carry it far to the east of the island. But suddenly it banked over on its right wing tip, pivoted around and headed straight toward the house. The vibrating hum of its motor died away.

"Back in the house, everybody." Ashwood's voice was quiet, unworried. Williams and Martin, who, hearing the sound of the engine, had rushed out to the porch, went inside at once, followed by the girl. Lucci hesitated, regarding the cripple doubtfully. Ashwood stared at him in surprise.

"Did you hear what I said, Lucci?" The cripple's voice had a cutting edge which startled the Italian. For a moment the wills of the two men clashed, then Lucci, puzzled and cursing himself for his obedience, walked into the house. The white-haired man relaxed and closed his eyes, as though unutterably weary.

From her bedroom window Nancy watched the monoplane glide slowly down toward the island, as though to land. Then, when its fat balloon tires were scarcely twenty feet above the nearest palm, the engine roared deafeningly, the bow rose and it flashed across the tiny strip of shell and sawgrass and disappeared beyond her range of vision.

In a few moments the drone of the motor had faded into nothing.

CHAPTER X.

INTO THE LION'S JAWS.

"THERE'S your pecan grove, old-timer, if our luck holds out!" shouted Emory triumphantly, as Jerry left the island behind and headed east. "Your judgment was perfect. Now what 'll we do?"

"Find a place to land," suggested Stevens, unmoved, his jaws moving placidly. "Get far enough away so they can't see us come down. Then we'll figure out something." He made a careful notation upon a large-scale chart, then turned his attention to his pet, the machine gun, which he wiped as carefully as though it had received no care for weeks.

Jerry, his spirits dancing as he realized that they were probably at the end of their two thousand mile chase, spotted a long, narrow island, seven or eight miles from that which they had

just surveyed. A mile-long stretch of sand which looked hard enough to stand the monoplane's weight, offered a possible landing place. Making one low flight across its entire length to assure himself that the beach held no obstacles which might trip the wheels, he circled and dropped her, light as a bird, in a perfect three-point landing.

"Some one will have to pry me out of here," muttered the detective crossly. "I'm too old for this sort of thing. At my age a man needs peace and quiet instead of gallivanting to hellangone all over the country in one of these flying horse-stalls."

"There was a parachute, if you were really fed up with it," suggested Emory, slyly. Stevens ignored the sally in scornful silence, climbing stiffly out of the cabin door. Once on solid ground, he stretched himself and walked briskly around the plane to loosen his cramped limbs.

"Pardon me if I seem to crow," offered Emory, "but you birds will have to admit that this was a pretty piece of navigating. You were both fit to be tied when that gasket blew out and we had to slide down near Tallahassee, leaving the amphibian to sail away on its merry course to the southward."

"Huh, you weren't doing any buck and wing dance yourself!" retorted Jerry.

"Not at the moment," admitted his comrade, modestly. "But you'll grant that when I studied the map last night, used the ruler and projected the line of the amphibian's flight, I drew a circle around the Ten Thousand Islands on the extreme southwestern course of Florida and told you we'd find our little hide-and-go-seek partners somewhere within my penciled line. I hate to brag, preferring to let others do it for me, but, hearing no applause, I'll

assert that as a prophet I'm the seventh son of a seventh son."

"Clap hands, Steve," giped Jerry, "he's the original shrinking violet!"

"I been around quite a bit," asserted Stevens, paying no attention to the others' repartee, "but I never knew there was a place in the country like this. Thousands and thousands of square miles of swamp and scrub on the mainland, not a sign of a human anywhere. Hundreds and hundreds—thousands, maybe—of these islands, not a soul on them, miles and miles away from the track of shipping. I bet there's many of these islands no human foot has ever stepped on. What a place for criminals to hide out! Good thing more of them don't know about it. But at that, without a heap of money, they couldn't live here. Have to bring all their victuals from a town a hundred miles or so away. No water on most of these keys, I reckon. All the same, it's a mighty fine hide-away."

"Those kidnapers might have remained hidden the rest of their lives," agreed Jerry, "if we hadn't followed them far enough to figure out their compass course before they started their jump across the northeastern corner of the Gulf of Mexico."

"If I hadn't figured it out, you mean!" Emory was irrepressible. The nearness to probable conflict was like the effect of sparkling wine.

"PIPE down and listen. I have a plan," announced Jerry, his face suddenly serious. "Now that we're here, we've got to do something about getting our feet on the island that house is on. We wouldn't get anywhere landing there with our plane. They've undoubtedly got machine guns and would wash us out before our propeller stopped whirling."

"What ho, the Delphic Oracle speaks!" applauded Emory, his face solemn.

"One more peep out of you and I'll bury you alive in the sand!" Jerry threatened heatedly. "Now here's what I have in mind. We'll pump up the collapsible rubber boat. Then I'll paddle it from one island to another until I get to the one nearest them. I'll deflate the boat and hide it in the scrub, go to the shore toward the house and yell for help. They'll probably rescue me, out of curiosity, at least. I'll tell them some kind of a cock-and-bull yarn and try to get the lay of the land and—"

"And to-morrow," interjected Emory, "Steve and I'll fly over the island and drop the conventional flowers on your grave."

"Shut up! To-morrow, some time in the afternoon, you get your machine gun ready and, as our witty friend has suggested, fly over the island. If things are right, I'll find some way to show something white, a tablecloth, or a sheet, or a napkin, even, out of a window or on the lawn. If you see it, come on down, ready for trouble, while I create some kind of a rumpus in the house to keep every one annoyed."

"It's a lousy idea!" drawled Emory.

"Why?"

"Just this: I hate to throw money matters in your face, but I financed the expedition for the fun there would be in it. Now, the first time that it looks as though there might be a little excitement, you go and try to take the play away from me. Seems to me you might let me paddle over to the island and you and the old-timer here do the manna from heaven act."

Stevens spat reflectively and scratched himself.

"Me," he ventured, "I don't think it's so good, either. What we ought to do is to fly to the nearest town and get all the cops in sight and then come back in a boat and raid the place good and proper. I'm a peaceable feller and I smell trouble if we're going to mill around so impetuous-like. But, on the other hand, if we call in the bulls, we'll have to split the rewards twenty-thirty ways."

It was evident that the detective was on the horns of a dilemma and the others were quick to see their advantage.

"Sure," agreed Jerry hastily. "To take a place like that island in a direct attack would give them time to prepare sand trenches and emplacements for their machine guns, if they haven't them already built. For a massed attack, fifty men would be none too many. We'd hardly get a nickel. You could kiss your pecan grove good-by so far as this particular job is concerned."

STEVENS sighed heavily. It seemed, he commented moodily, as though life was all full of trouble for an old feller who wanted to get along as easy as he could. Guns, shooting, blood and thunder—he couldn't seem to get away from them. He'd had a hunch that there would be trouble on this kidnaping case and wasn't he always right?

Last time he had had such a hunch, he had waded in just the same. Next thing he knew he was cornered in a dark forecastle of a limey tramp steamer with a dozen Lascars pushing and shoving each other for the honor of spilling his insides all over the deck. Hadn't made one extra cent, either, for all the trouble it took to get out of there alive with his dope-smuggling prisoner.

"Tell you what I'll do, Emory!" suggested Jerry, brightening. "I'll match you to see which of us goes alone to the island. You've a prior right because you're the financial angel. On the other hand, it was my skull that was cracked by those gunmen and I have a close personal interest in passing the time of day with the bird that pulled the trigger. So we'll match. One toss settles it."

"Have you still got that quarter that had tails on both sides?" demanded Emory cautiously.

"Listen, fellers," interrupted Stevens. "Seems to me you are forgetting there are three of us. We'll match, the odd man goes."

Jerry and Emory gazed at him in astonishment, but there was something so quietly determined about the little man's face that they forebore to protest.

They matched. Emory and Stevens turned up heads. Jerry triumphantly exhibited a tail. Emory stared at him suspiciously, but the winner gleefully pocketed the coin and strode toward the fuselage where the rubber boat was stowed. While his comrade glowered, Stevens shook his head sadly. Time was, he remembered, when he had been all get-up-and-go like these boys. Well, time would temper them unless they went and got themselves killed first.

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW "GUEST."

SOMEHOW, to Nancy's relieved amazement, another breathless day had dragged through its laggard hours without bloodshed. Mal-lory, bandaged and looking very sick, had remained indoors, glowering over one high ball after another. Hamilton

had been engrossed, as usual, in his interminable Canfield. Martin and Williams, vague, inoffensive figures, drifted in and out of the rooms.

Nancy's scalp tightened and prickled whenever she looked into their eyes, such depths of misery and incipient madness were reflected there. Lucci and Ashwood had discussed business intermittently without apparently reaching any understanding. Lucci's fervid appeals to the cripple's ambitions seemed to have fallen upon arid ground.

A faint whisper of cool wind rattled the dry palm leaves as the livid sun dived unceremoniously beneath the hard line of the horizon. This, thought Nancy, was the only worthwhile moment of the day. The sky was unbelievably riotous with color.

Peacock blues, corals and magentas splashed great swaths across the puff-ball clouds, paling into marvelously delicate pastel tints of the same colors as they spread over the entire dome of the sky to the very eastern horizon. The girl caught her breath at the sheer wonder of it. Yet how inappropriate! The setting was one for a gay, light-hearted musical comedy instead of the grim, sordid tragedy which was rapidly approaching its crisis. She drew a shawl more snugly about her shoulders.

Ashwood, lounging indolently a dozen feet away, was watching the kaleidoscopic play of colors with an appreciative eye. Suddenly, however, he sat bolt upright, gazing fixedly across the mile-wide stretch of iridescent water toward the sand bordering the nearest island to the east. He rose, shrilled his peculiar whistle and pointed across to where, etched in black against the tinted background of sand, stood a solitary figure, waving a white handkerchief.

Instantly, it seemed, a swift motor boat, manned by a crew of three, dashed out of the camouflaged dock and headed across the channel. Lucci, Mallory, Wilson and Martin emerged from the house to stand lined up at the porch rail, watching the speeding boat in expectant silence, speculating inwardly upon the meaning of the stranger in the lives of those on the kidnappers' island.

The mahogany boat coasted up to the opposite shore, the three men leaped out on the beach and, after a brief parley with the newcomer, took him ashore and returned with him to the boathouse.

As the lone man, surrounded by the three guards, walked toward the house, Nancy became aware of an intuitive certainty that he was not a casual wayfarer, but a messenger from those of the outside world who were interested in her rescue. He had been in the water, that much was evident, for his clothes clung wetly to his muscular figure. The girl watched him intently, straining her eyes as though to read in his face what message he might be bringing.

Of medium height, the set of his shoulders and the narrowness of his hips gave his slight figure a liteness, a grace of modeling, which would have gladdened the eyes of an artist. He was not handsome, for his mouth was too large and his jaw too prominent. But his tanned face—a little impudent, perhaps—had a carefree, reckless something in it which gave him a distinction not to be gained by mere good looks.

The girl's heart gave a sudden bound. She knew she had seen that careless grin before. The twinkling gray eyes, as they swept over the row of people lining the rail, hesitated briefly as they met her gaze, then passed on. She knew, now. The young

chap who had asked for a lift on the Merrick Road!

Her flash of intuition had, then, been right; he was in the vanguard of the rescuing party. It could hardly be, she considered, that he had failed to recognize her, so, being an innate actress, she gazed straight at him with unmoved expression, betraying not the slightest sign that she had ever seen him before.

"GREETINGS, greetings, my friend," came Ashwood's lazy voice. "What is responsible for this delightful visit?"

Jerry gazed at him with astonishment. Surely this harmless-looking cripple could not be the leader of a band of kidnaping desperadoes! It would be that bandaged, saturnine Italian on his right, or the powerfully-built, bandaged fellow on the other side of the girl. Yet as soon as the old-young man had spoken, the guards fell back to a discreet distance, where they remained, watchful, awaiting further instructions.

"Sorry to have butted in like this," replied the flyer cheerfully. "My boat sank and left me all wet, so to speak."

"Indeed?" Ashwood's voice was mildly satirical. "A boat, eh? I was expecting to hear that you had blown out a tube and couldn't telephone for a tire repair crew to come and mend it."

"I'm not sure that I like your tone," stated Jerry coldly, meeting the other's gaze with a challenging stare. "But since I'm already indebted to you, I'll have to explain. I was paddling along the chain of islands over there, expecting to camp somewhere along here for the night. Just the other side of that island you saw me on, my boat sank. Seemed as though I would be in something of a mess, for there was no

drinking water, even, on the whole key. I wandered around, saw your house from the beach and signaled."

"How unfortunate," murmured the cripple, soothingly. "I am only too happy, however, to offer you our humble hospitality until this somewhat odd but very delightful house-party breaks up." He clapped his hands, after the Eastern custom.

"This is a new guest, Alfred," he explained to the steward who appeared before the echo of his signal had died away. "Find the gentleman a room and permit him to select a wardrobe from the clothes storeroom. By the way, sir, would it not be well if we learned your name? We are by no means formal, here, but it is somewhat embarrassing to go about calling each other 'hey' and 'you.'"

"I am Walter Peabody, of New York," replied Jerry.

"A delightful name, I'm sure. Permit me to present you to our guests, whom you will doubtless know quite intimately before you leave. This beautiful lady, whom you may have recognized, is Miss Nancy Wentworth, the most charming actress who ever gladdened the hearts of ticket speculators."

Jerry looked straight into Nancy's brown eyes and bowed impersonally. Ashwood's keen regard did not miss a flicker of his expression, or hers.

"Mr.—er—Peabody, this somewhat moth-eaten gentleman with the small

patches of olive epidermis appearing between the bandages, is one of Chicago's civic leaders, a monument to the industry which made him both famous and prosperous: Mr. One-shot Lucci."

Jerry permitted himself a start of surprise and an amazed glance at the frowning Italian. Then he turned abruptly to Ashwood, who appeared to be thoroughly enjoying himself.

"I've been reading the newspapers, Mr.—but you haven't introduced yourself."

"How neglectful of me," apologized the cripple. "I am called Limpy Ashwood."

"Sorry," Jerry shook his head thoughtfully. "That doesn't mean a thing to me. But, as I started to explain, I do read the newspapers and I'm afraid that I've stumbled into a hornets' nest. There are a lot of people in this country who would like to be introduced to Miss Wentworth and One-shot Lucci right now."

"Then I'm sure you'll understand," murmured Ashwood suavely, "why you may as well settle down to become a member in good standing of our little house-party."

Jerry grinned ruefully and nodded. Then he patted his dripping clothes suggestively.

"A thousand pardons!" exclaimed the cripple. "Alfred, show Mr. Peabody to his room instantly. We'll complete the introductions at your convenience."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



The Morale Breakers



"Over, under, around or through," was the old cavalry motto—and ex-cavalryman Mickey Conner had need of it as he guided his little tank into a bursting, steel-swept, earth-rocking inferno

By F. V. W. MASON

THE sound of artillery fire suddenly swelled into a chaotic clamor somewhere in the gray mist ahead, and Sergeant Michael Conner peered anxiously through the eye-slits before him. His square, gray-haired head, girt in an exceedingly scarred and oil-stained football helmet, jutted forward.

"Slow 'er up, Joe," he yelled. "The road's gettin' too jammed."

In the dark interior of the two-man Renault tank the stink of hot oil

and burned gasoline fumes became stronger as the coughing of the exhaust slowed.

"Will you look at them doughboys beat it? Looks as if the Jerries were only two jumps behind and gainin' ground," grunted the driver, vigorously massaging his side where a thick sheepskin-padded coat had failed to protect. "There's somethin' damned wrong just ahead."

There came no answer from the cupola as the tank rolled on past a

confused tangle of camouflaged trucks and artillery limbers which had become hopelessly involved with a shifting brown tide of retreating infantry that had overflowed the road and ran out over thinly wooded fields to either side.

"Man!" grunted Conner. "Look at all them camions and artillery down there! Why, the whole damn brigade's tied up. Looks like work for us ahead. Keep to the right, you dunderheaded mechanic."

Clattering, the tank rolled farther away from the road.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Conner hailed a wild-eyed, weary runner who trotted parallel to the course of the tank.

"Hell to pay," he panted. "Some damned fools in our artillery got—brainstorm. Shelling only road 'cross ridge. Division's tied up—like duck's foot in mud."

"Sure they ain't Kraut shells?" yelled the driver corporal, with one hand removing his football helmet and wiping away great beads of sweat.

"Naw!" The runner's voice dwinded as he pounded on past a great shell crater filled with yellow water. "Them is '75's, all right, bursts white! It's—hell of a war when—gotta fight Boche and your own artillery too. So long!"

"He's damned well right," agreed Conner, as the Renault jolted heavily after the tank in front of it. "This is one hell of a war when they ain't got no cavalry in it. Here's me, Mickey Conner, sergeant o' cavalry ever since the Boxer row; and now look at me! A damned, dirty, split-trousered mechanic."

The driver corporal tilted his head back and yelled up into the cupola: "Aw, can that blasted yap about cavalry—I'm sick and tired of it!"

"Wait till we get outta this can on wheels," Sergeant Conner promised, "and I'll make you sicker. The lousiest dog robber in my old troop was more of a man than any ten tripe-eating mechanics in this whole outfit."

THE gray-haired sergeant's voice was drowned out by a brief, wailing scream that ended in a deafening explosion.

"Left!" he shouted. "Quick, there's a tree falling just ahead!"

Immediately the tank's left tread halted, and the little Renault swung about just in time to avoid being buried by a huge oak which, felled by the blast of a .210, crashed to earth just as another shell burst among a convoy of high-sided camouflaged Quads, laden with ammunition for the hard-pressed batteries farther up.

The result was frightful, for the ammunition, detonated by the concussion, blew up in terrific sheets of flame that rained death and destruction upon all but the six little tanks. The earth reeled and the air was filled with screaming splinters of steel that rattled viciously on the armor, then glanced off to slaughter the panic-stricken infantry.

"Gawd!" yelled the driver. "This is awful! Conner! Conner! You all right?"

"Yeh. Keep movin'." Conner found it hard to get out the words, so stunned and sickened was he. "Watch out for that crater—you'll tip us over."

While three more heavies crashed into the harassed division, there was nothing to do but to hang on—and try to forget the terrible screams and yells that drifted in from the misty gray world outside the Renault's cupola.

"Well," said the sergeant, with an

effort to break the strain, "the whole outfit's tied up simply because the road is bein' shelled. Now, if we was the cavalry, we'd 'a' been over the ridge long ago. Our motter was, 'Over, under, around or through.'"

But the driver corporal was too overwhelmed by the horrors on all sides to do more than keep his tank in line with the rest as they rumbled and rattled on past dismounted caissons, burning trucks and smoking shell holes.

All at once the leading tank halted, and the scarlet-helmeted head of Lieutenant Mosby, group leader, appeared from behind steel doors, for a runner with a red brassard ran up, waving his arms frantically.

"You're to go to the edge of the woods," the runner yelled and hurled himself flat as a shell wailed by and exploded in the woods to the right. Then he got up, mud-covered and breathless.

"Follow those railroad tracks over there." He jerked a blackened thumb to an embankment upon which rusty overgrown rails were just visible.

Through the slits Conner's eyes obediently followed the indicated embankment and saw farther down it the charred remains of a freight train that had been destroyed by shellfire.

"Where does this railroad go?" Conner heard the lieutenant asking.

"It used to be the Chaulnes-Amiens line," panted the runner over his shoulder. "Better hurry, sir, they need you bad up ahead!"

AS though to greet the tanks, the barrage roared even louder when the half dozen Renaults, camouflaged brown and green, pointed their blunt noses straight at the uproar and commenced to roll on again.

5 A

"We're goin' to get it," grunted the corporal as he threw in his clutch. "There's always dirty work for the tanks. Is yer insurance O. K., sergeant dear?"

"Yeh, that's the hell of these blasted tanks—if we was cavalry we wouldn't have to follow no road; we could ride right over this ridge that's too steep for these damned tin cans on treads."

Twenty minutes' travel through an increasing tangle of furious and bewildered artillery, ordnance and supply brought the tank group to the edge of a little wood whose few remaining leaves still dripped with dew.

Through his eye-slits Conner studied the shell-lashed terrain ahead and caught sight of a series of steep brown rock ridges which apparently barred all progress. In the gray light of dawn he could just see the road which was sustaining that disastrous, morale-breaking fire. He could even catch glimpses of shells—.75's all right—bursting over it. It was odd how those shells burst in mid-air, springing into being like corn in a popper.

The sound of steel doors being opened warned him that the corporal driver was getting out; so with Lieutenant Mosby and the other tank sergeants he leaped into a huge shell crater where crouched a helmeted, gray-faced officer wearing the single star of a brigadier general on his shoulder straps. He was surrounded by half a dozen anxious-eyed officers and runners.

"Bad?" he was saying. "Fatal! Those damned batteries are decimating the division!"

A hawk-faced infantry colonel ran up, saluted hurriedly and burst into a stream of expostulations.

"Some of our own artillery's spraying the road ahead—.75's!" he

stormed. "My men are on the point of mutiny. It's all I can do to keep them from going back and bayonetting the first artillery they see."

Balefully the brigadier glared. "You had better keep your men in hand," he rasped. "The guns firing on the road are .75's. But they're not ours."

The colonel was taken aback. "Not ours, sir?"

"No. The enemy captured a lot of .75's during the spring drive, and Intelligence found out they've trained two or three battalions to use them. The idea was to do just what they're doing now, to raise hell with our morale by making our men think they are being shelled by their own artillery."

"But can't they be stopped, sir?" fiercely pleaded the colonel, his face twitching. "We've got a terrible casualty list already."

The brigadier's gray face grew grayer and his long jaw set itself into a square, forbidding line.

"No," he said, "You'll have to take cover as best you can. We've no heavy artillery or howitzers available and it's still too dark for the planes to be of any use. Our guns can't reach the enemy as there's no firing data."

WITH hands that shook a little, the brigadier snatched a map from a brown leather case slung by his side, then beckoned Lieutenant Mosby and the rest of the foot-ball-helmeted, overalled men.

"Look here and pay attention," he growled. "Every second's precious. There's just one road over this ridge to Chaulnes. You see?"

The tip of the brigadier's none too clean forefinger indicated a narrow white strip on the green background.

"Now our artillery and ammunition

trains have got to use this road or none. They can't use it now, see?" He turned to Lieutenant Mosby. "It's your job to force a way across that ridge and wipe out the enemy .75's on the far side. You'll have to go up the road under fire, it's the only way across. Get over on the other side of the ridge and machine gun hell out of those German batteries. 'The Morale Breakers,' they're called."

Under his coating of black grease, Lieutenant Mosby's face went a little pale and his features sharpened, for the swish and *c-r-r-ump!* of shells bursting along the road was deafening and uninterrupted.

At this point a bearded man in horizon blue appeared leaping painfully from one shell-hole to the next. Conner could see that the whole left side of his uniform was dyed red and that his helmet was missing. Limply, he rolled into the big crater.

"Quick!" he choked. "You mus' advance, *mon général*—your delay have left open our flank—ze Boche are driving us back—" The liaison officer spat redly and gripped his side as he went on. "You mus' advance before half-pas' seex—or we are lost!"

"Half-past six? Great God!" The brigadier's voice shook. "That's only twenty-five minutes." He gazed despairingly about, conscious that the barrage yet remained, barring all advance. Then he turned on Lieutenant Mosby. "Quick—get into your tanks. You'll *have* to get over there and silence those batteries. If you don't there'll be thousands of French and Americans needlessly killed. Hurry!"

There was an unvoiced appeal in the harassed brigadier's blue eyes. He alone appreciated the full extent of the disaster that would result should the enemy batteries not be swiftly silenced.

Only too well he realized that the doughboys, mostly raw replacements, convinced they were being shelled by their own batteries, would refuse to do anything save take cover until the storm of steel had subsided.

Like chickens scattering from a hawk's shadow, the tank sergeants dashed back to their panting machines. Steel doors slammed resoundingly and almost at once the sputtering roar of exhausts grew loud as the six light tanks took a column formation, quitted the shelter of the woods, and rumbled out onto the steel-drenched plain to attempt a forlorn hope that might stem the tide of disaster and death.

THE six camouflaged monsters lurched down off the railroad right-of-way and shifted into a diamond formation while pursuing a course parallel to the disputed road. Almost immediately the bursting shells swung to meet the crawling column.

Conner's heart commenced to thump when he glimpsed the leading tank in line with a towering geyser of earth, flame and smoke. Other bursts commenced groping to locate the formation as it bumped and rattled up the shell pitted green slopes below the ridge.

Zw-e-e-e! Something screeched by the cupola and burst in the woods behind.

Conner's shoulderblades began to itch with more than the fearful heat. It was rather awful not knowing what they might find among those woods at the foot of the ridge.

"Steady, Joe," he yelled to the driver. "Keep more to the right, out on the flank, we'll be harder to hit."

C-r-r-ump! The tank shook like a reed under the concussion of the .210 that plunged into the earth not fifty

feet behind and spewed up a great fountain of earth, flame and smoke.

"This is gettin' awful!" yelled the driver. "They're liable to hit us square in a minute."

The dawn was brighter now and a dull red glow lit the steel cupolas of the other five tanks rolling on through green wheat high as the treads and lurching heavily over new shell-holes.

Shortly the group commenced to encounter scattered groups of doughboys with strained white faces. They crouched in shell-holes and dug furiously with entrenching tools or lay flat among occasional clumps of trees watching that terrific barrage wander up and down the road like a string of titanic firecrackers.

On it Conner could see a convoy of Quads heaped in grotesque ruin. Some trucks lay on their sides like wounded animals, others on their backs with wheels pathetically upturned, and all around them lay thick swaths of dead men in khaki.

All at once the enemy gunners found the tank formation's range and made the world rock and reel about them. Visibility became difficult, then impossible, for like snaky streamers, billows of smoke and gas enveloped the tanks in a woolly pall that made their drivers' eyes water and smart.

Now and then a sudden red and yellow glare throbbed in the gloom and a thunderous explosion shook earth and bits of barbed wire and steel over the crawling Renaults.

"Like a boat in a fog," thought the sergeant. "Wish we could see where we was goin'. . . wonder how the time's holdin' out?"

He risked a look at his wristwatch in its nickel cage and saw that ten minutes of the fateful half hour had already escaped. And the "Morale

Breakers" were increasing their disastrous fire rather than slackening it.

"Boy, I hope there's no traps ahead," thought Conner as the Renault rocked under the detonation of a shell which burst not thirty feet away.

Still blinking, he wiped sweat from his face and peered through the eye-slits, then stiffened as Number Two tank just ahead became suddenly smothered in a jewel-like sheet of scarlet and gold flame.

"A direct hit! *Fini* poor old Morgan," he grunted. "Our turn next."

But the Renault bored steadily on through the wavering smoke toward the ridge.

ZANG! Not six inches from his head the cupola was struck again and the whole tank rocked while hot choking gases poured in through the eye-slits making Conner and Joe cough furiously.

"We're getting there," he thought. "But we'll never be in time. Tough on the Frogs!"

"God! Look ahead!" The driver's voice was hoarse with fear and Conner felt the Renault lurch madly as the driver corporal made frantic efforts to turn.

Peering through the eye-slits he stared unbelieving, for from among the drifting smoke appeared a huge gray outline. Elephantine and grotesque it was, bearing down on the little Renault. Cursing furiously, Conner saw a black-painted iron cross materialize on the apparition's V-shaped bows.

"A Boche tank!"

As in a dream he beheld a gun swinging in his direction—a .77 at least, with a silvery plume of smoke curling from its muzzle. Despairingly he turned his Hotchkiss around and, steadying it as best he could against

the mad jolting, loosed a burst squarely into the gun port.

Like magic, bright flecks appeared when the bullets scraped off the gray paint, and though the high-sided monster still clanked on, the menacing barrel suddenly drooped and ceased to vomit death.

"Guess I got the gunners," he thought and clung to the hand rails watching in dread the inexorable approach of the rivet studded bows. Desperately the smaller tank scrambled to avoid being rammed. Closer—closer! Conner set his teeth, that tremendous bow was not ten feet away from the Renault.

Clang! The German tank struck a glancing blow, shaking the Renault like a baby's rattle. Followed the harsh grinding of gears, the roar of reports alongside. Then Conner, surprised to find the Renault still moving, trained his gun on the gray tank and gave it a farewell lashing before it became lost in the smoke.

Quivering at the narrowness of the escape Conner pressed on, now crushing flat a barrier of rusty barbed wire, now straddling a series of abandoned trenches.

Where were the other tanks? Had any of them gained the ridge? Fierce questioning racked the sweat-bathed sergeant's head. Fifteen minutes gone and the division was still held up! No hope for the French with their flanks open.

Into the symphony of uproar came a new sound like the advent of a horn in a passage of string instruments. At first the bewildered sergeant failed to identify it; the noise was not deep enough to be the report of a cannon, but yet too loud for that of a rifle or a machine gun.

"Damn! If I could only see clear!"

he panted. "We'll have to be magicians to get across that blasted ridge."

OFF to the right Conner caught a glimpse of something familiar; it was the railroad track heading straight for the steep rock ridge, which was visible because a puff of wind had cleared away the smoke momentarily.

Though the interior of the tank was hot as any Turkish bath, the veteran felt a trickle of ice water coursing down his spine, for now he could see Number One tank. It was lying half in, half out of a huge shell crater, with black smoke and bright yellow flames spurting furiously from its cupola—definitely and permanently out of action. Then he knew what those peculiar reports were, and his jaw shut with a click.

"Anti-tank rifles!" he raved. "Fat chance we stand o' livin' to cross that bloody ridge!"

Spang! A neat round hole appeared three inches to the left of the right eye-slit, and Conner's stomach felt strangely empty; it was his first experience with armor-piercing bullets.

Meanwhile his tank and the three other survivors rumbled on with two large but slower German machines in pursuit. A sudden and terrific detonation momentarily drowned the steady roar of the .75 barrage.

"What in hell?" Shaken with a strange anxiety, Conner peered through the eye-holes just in time to see Number Four tank meet the fate of Number Three.

The little Renault was just crossing a shallow ditch when the earth beneath its steel treads vomited a terrific perpendicular shaft of purple-green flame that blew off the nose of Number Four tank as though it had been cardboard. Smoke and fumes rolled like a fog.

"Land mines!" he reflected bitterly, and fought to stay his panic at the thought that any clod of earth just before his own treads might conceal a detonator.

"Turn right, Joe!" he yelled with a throat that burned and felt strangely constricted. "Right, hard! It's suicide to keep on."

Every instant expecting to be blown to atoms, he directed a lateral movement. What to do? There was only one other tank left, and the ridge was yet uncrossed. As best he might he examined the terrain, but found it hopelessly uniform.

"Think, you boob," he told himself. "Use yer brains. You gotta get them guns over there!"

He scanned the ridge, but saw the impossibility of scaling it. His bafflement was complete, maddening, and apparently hopeless. Actually those deadly "Morale Breakers" were less than half a mile away—yet they might be in Berlin for all he could do to them.

"What to do?" he groaned as the tank paralleled the ridge. "If we ain't in one hell of a fix!"

Rifle and machine gun bullets rattled on the armor like hail on a tin roof, but he made desperate efforts to think clearly, constructively.

Into his brain flashed an image of the brigadier's face, and with a sinking feeling he recalled the awful tension, the tragic suspense written there. Behind him the disastrous traffic jam was swelling each instant, and men were dying like flies. He must do something. But what? The only road was closed—that much was sure.

"Damn it!" he raved. "To hell with these lousy tanks. If I only had some cavalry—'Over, under, around or through.' We'd get there!" Try as he

would, he couldn't think; the noxious engine fumes stifled and nauseated him, and the terrible heat deadened his brain. This was no way to fight, cooped up in a black steel cage.

HE glanced through the rear port and amid the haze of smoke beheld the other tank bumping on over the shell-torn ground. Evidently Sergeant Green had also seen the futility of trying to fight heavy tanks while advancing over thickly mined terrain.

All at once on the Renault's right side commenced the sharp metallic tattoo, something like the noise of a riveter at work, but this time from a new direction. A machine gun was firing from the base of the ridge. Conscious that each passing second brought disaster nearer, Conner racked his brain in an agony of indecision, then crouched low on his steel seat, searching, looking ahead.

What was the objective? Oh, yes, Chaulnes. Chaulnes? Abruptly he recalled that the railroad ran between Amiens and Chaulnes. If the railroad went to Chaulnes it must cross that ridge, but where?

Suddenly into Sergeant Conner's haggard, sweating and oil-spattered features crept a singularly intent expression.

"By thunder, that might be it! We can't go over that damned ridge, we can't go under nor around, but we might go *through* it! . . . Give 'er the gas, Joe," he yelled over the endless chatter of the motor. "To the right! Head back for that damned railroad we saw."

The driver corporal shouted some reply that Conner could not understand, but nevertheless skidded the tank off to the right, and the treads

commenced crushing the wheat at full speed while .75's from the "Morale Breakers" rained down.

What had happened to Number Five tank? Out with a direct hit! A strange determination gripped him with the knowledge that his was the last surviving tank. The whole show was now up to him—a fearful, crushing responsibility.

At its maximum speed of twelve miles an hour, the lone Renault scrambled off as though in full flight, bumping and lurching drunkenly, crushing saplings and crawling across large water-filled shell craters. Again and again Conner's helmeted skull was banged viciously against the walls of the cupola, until his head rang dizzily.

"Where's that, damned railroad?" he kept asking himself. "It can't be far. . . . Only ten minutes left." From the rich storehouse of twenty years in the Army he drew curses to hurl at the Renault's snail-like pace, at captured .75's, at generals who expected miracles.

But at last the ridge top became invisible and its first slopes were under the treads. From a wood to the right a machine gun nest manned by helmeted men in *Feldgrau* instantly traversed their weapon and opened up at short range.

"Ah, you would monkey with the buzz saw!" In fierce relief at having a real target, Conner uttered a grunt of satisfaction and swung the Hotchkiss in line with the nest just as it opened fire.

Clang! Clang! Clang! The Boche Maxim's bullets shattered themselves against the armor and sent a spatter of lead hissing through the eye-holes. A few particles struck through and sent a trickle of blood from Conner's sweaty cheek.

"Now I got yuh!"

The German crew gamely stood its ground; he could see their eyes enormous in the shade of their helmets when the Hotchkiss's first burst mowed them down like marionettes whose strings were cut.

Three of the four gray-clad gunners collapsed, with boiling hot water and steam from the pierced water jacket of the machine gun squirting over their limp bodies. The fourth man was trying to crawl away on hands and knees, shrieking at the sight of the wide steel treads poised over his body.

CONNER paid no attention to him, for now the weed-covered right-of-way was in sight once more. Desperately intent, he strained his eyes toward the brown stone ridge and presently found what he sought.

Not very far away a wide strip of camouflage hung from a façade of dressed stone, concealing what must be the entrance to the railroad tunnel. He was shaken with a sudden fear. Perhaps the entrance had been blocked up? Well, they'd have to gamble.

"Where in hell are ya goin'?" Above the engine's metallic panting Joe's voice rang out in sharp alarm. "Yuh can't keep on—"

"The hell we can't! Follow them tracks!" roared Conner, staring through the eye-slits. Only seven minutes left—the thought was maddening.

"C'n we get through?"

"Damned if I know; we're goin' to find out. Keep her straight at it, you oil-blooded mechanic!"

With the speed that seemed unreal, the sturdy little tank clambered to the summit of the right-of-way and there rocked uncertainly while hundreds of rifles and several machine guns opened

up a mad drumming on her armor as though they sought to blow her from the earth.

Praying that no anti-tank rifles might be among those defenses, Conner listened intently to the insistent hammer of the bullets dancing a tap dance of death outside, and watched the camouflage over the entrance. He could see it quite clearly now; it was composed of strips of cloth woven through chicken wire and then painted brown and green. Just before the edge of the camouflage curtain was a low mound of earth—an emplacement of some sort with the tops of many helmets visible in it.

It was now fifty yards away, now twenty yards. Did it shelter a masked field gun? Or only machine guns? Would some lucky shot smash the treads and put a final end to the forlorn hope?

R-r-r-a-n-ng! The bullets made the tank's armor shiver and resound like a gong as from behind the mound of fresh brown earth soared a long-handled grenade.

Wham! It exploded not ten feet in front of the Renault whose camouflaged sides were now marked with innumerable bright flecks. Through the drifting smoke of the grenade, the sweating, wild-eyed American saw three Maxims now devoting their whole attention to this outrageous tank. A cold hand closed over Conner's heart, as from below sounded a low shriek of pain.

"God! I've got a splinter through my neck."

TEN yards away was that mound of earth and beyond it lay the tunnel mouth. Had it been blocked up? Reduced in size? Did it shelter a field gun that would blow

them into red ruin at short range? Conner wondered.

It all wavered strangely before Conner's straining bloodshot eyes, and his usually steady nerves throbbed like Indian war drums. Through the slits he had queer, confused impressions of many red faces, open mouths—running legs in clumsy boots—dozens of gray-clad bodies in motion.

The noise was deafening, maddening, intolerable. If it didn't stop soon he'd go crazy!

More to steady himself than anything else he loosed a strip of ammunition into a throng of yelling enemies, leaping by tens and twenties from the trench, deserting their machine guns.

Nearer! With savage pleasure Conner traversed the Hotchkiss back and forth, scarce noting the recoil nor smelling the bitter fumes of smokeless powder that stung his eyes and nostrils. Suddenly a whole row of gray-clad figures lay slumped in the tank's path. He wondered how Joe was making out. Was his wound bad?

Up, up. The tank's treads scaled the raw earth parapet of the trench.

Bang! Clatter!

The Renault rocked forward in a jolt that pushed Conner's shoulder into the Hotchkiss's stock with cruel force. Robbed of breath, he had a curious confused impression of coarse cloth fluttering just before his eyes. If the cupola hadn't been there he could have reached out and touched it. Deep voices were yelling insanely all around him. Could they stop him? No! He would win through—he had to get there, there was nothing else to do.

R-r-rip! The camouflage was giving suddenly to envelop the tank in its folds. Blinded, the Americans were forced to come to a halt.

"Can't see," weakly Joe's voice

came out of the black confused tumult. "I—I'm hit bad."

"Back her, you fool!" snarled Conner in desperation. "We gotta get rid o' this stuff. Quick or they'll mob us!"

The whirring and clatter of gears and the stench of engine fumes grew stronger as the Renault recoiled slowly out into the gray morning light, cutting a wake through a throng of yelling Germans who had sought to scramble onto the back of the tank. Two or three succeeded and Conner could hear them panting just outside as they searched for a crevice to fire through.

The smothering, blinding folds of the camouflage followed for a distance, then on becoming entangled in some barbed wire it jerked itself loose. Light again invaded the cupola and Conner beheld a bayonet blade stabbing futilely through the left eye-slit as some infantryman tried to pry off the cupola cap.

The German fired and the rifle bullet drew a scarlet line across Conner's left cheek.

"Get offa there!" Sensing a crisis Conner put his weight on the Hotchkiss's stock and literally swept off the assailants with a blast of lead.

"Forward!" yelled Conner, loosing a few bursts into the gloom of the tunnel. "They'll get us out here!"

Past the lichen-browned gray stones of an arch rattled the Renault and crushed a table and some field telephones. Towing an accumulation of snapped telephone wires after it, it smashed relentlessly on while the light grew ever dimmer.

Conner suddenly realized how black it was in there. When the Renault had gone one hundred feet in, the pair inside the panting, quivering little machine could see absolutely nothing. Perhaps the far end was blocked up

and they were trapped? It was unnerving, especially so when Joe, on becoming confused, lost all sense of direction and blundered with a resounding *clang* into one wall of the tunnel and wedged the Renault fast.

"Back her! Get her out!" shouted the sergeant, frenziedly peering through the eye-slits. "We've got only two minutes left!"

In his mind burned a furious rage against the "Morale Breakers" and their disastrous fire. They'd get the works if he could ever get through that infernal black tunnel.

LIGHT—they must have light! But the tank no longer carried such a thing as a headlight; the hail of machine gun bullets had long since carried them away.

Came a fresh and deadly blast of bullets into the tank's rear as the Germans hurriedly mounted two machine guns at the tunnel's mouth behind.

"Gotta have light," came the driver corporal's hoarse and frantic plea. "Don't know which way is which."

It was like a nightmare, thought Conner—no light, nothing rational, an uproar indescribable with everything confused and unreal. Suddenly he remembered.

"Peel your eyes, Joe, I'm goin' to whack off half a dozen rounds."

His fingers closed over the trigger of the Hotchkiss and reports crashed out, deafening in the confinement of the tunnel. But the brief orange flashes served to reveal dimly the moisture-wetted roof and walls.

The sergeant's heart leaped as the exhausts roared. Would the tank move? It shuddered, then while the Hotchkiss chattered again, Joe backed into the middle of the tunnel and straightened out. But more time,

precious time, had been lost! Conner dared not look at his watch.

Though half strangled and blinded by the engine fumes and the reek of burnt powder, he loosed a burst every half minute as, riding heavily over piles of supplies, over wooden bunks, tables, washstands, and field kitchens the Renault clanked on through the blackness of the tunnel, its steel treads rasping and skidding over the long disused rails until at last a pale glimmer loomed ahead.

In the last fifty yards Sergeant Conner used his machine gun frequently, for at the far end of the tunnel a German divisional headquarters had been installed.

Like men beholding the impossible, the stiff-backed, mustached officers stared, then aware of impending disaster, darted to and fro, golden epaulets glinting dully as they sought to rescue papers of vital importance before the bullet-scarred tank should reach them.

Fiercely intent, Conner stared about when the treads quitted the right-of-way and once more rolled over soft earth into a gently sloping valley. It was overrun with dejected French prisoners going to the rear, battalions of German infantry, gray-clad machine gunners and signalers hurrying to complete the American defeat. Where were those infernal batteries he was looking for?

On sweeping about the fresh green countryside, the bloodied, battered sergeant in the cupola found little trouble in locating the position of the "Morale Breakers," for the steady thunder of their firing was a sure guide. They lay concealed in clumps of woods whose tops had been splintered and shorn away by the vicious rain of shell fragments.

"Left, Joe! There they are, the sons o' buzzards! Left, and make it snappy!"

GRIPPED by a deadly fear they might be too late, Conner tried to clear his swimming head while the tank rolled on toward the spot where the deadly batteries were emplaced. Relentless, the bullet-scarred Renault plowed through underbrush yet dripping dew. Conner's bloodshot blue eyes flickered back and forth. How his head ached!

Crash! Leaves and branches ahead swayed madly as the hidden .75's hurled a fresh volley across Harbonnière ridge, and now Connor got a distinct glimpse of the camouflage about the hidden batteries billowing under the concussion.

A strange excitement gripped him as the first gun came into sight. About it were men very busy at their work. Some were fully clad, some were in grimy undershirts and still others were half naked with suspenders trailing over their hips and their red and pink bodies gleaming dully. All the artillerymen wore helmets.

So preoccupied were the gun crews that not one of them noted the elephantine form shouldering its way steadily through the young wood which sheltered the eight deadly guns.

The light was much better now, Conner realized as he traversed the Hotchkiss to rake the first piece.

How those damned gunners were working! As though motivated by clockwork, they slammed one shell after another into the reeking breech of their .75 and jumped back as the barrel recoiled, smoothly ejecting the smoking brass cartridge case.

"And now," he grunted as the Hotchkiss's sights found the gunners

of the nearest piece, "we'll see what's what, or I'm a Red Leg!"

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

Caught on the wrong side of the protecting gun shields, the German crew reeled and died in their tracks.

"Run over the trails!" Conner yelled to his driver. "We'll wreck these damned guns."

Like a modern Frankenstein the Renault began to rage along the line of emplacements, lashing one gun crew after another with the deadly hail of bullets, then riding over the piece and wholly wrecking it.

Confused and bewildered at this mysterious attack from the rear, the artillerymen scattered through the woods, panic-stricken. A few, more courageous than the rest, snatched up grenades and hurled them in the path of the fire-spitting steel fortress, but to no avail.

WHEN but two .75's remained to be disposed of, Conner's left hand, groping to the ammunition rack, found nothing and he swore terribly on realizing that the supply of Hotchkiss ammunition was ended. He hadn't realized he'd wasted so many shots in the tunnel. No more shots and two pieces remained to be put out of action.

Then to his horror he realized that the last gun crew was made of sterner stuff than the others; the helmeted gunners had lifted the piece's trail and, with the others straining on the wheel spokes, were hauling the .75 around in a courageous attempt to blow the Renault to pieces with a direct shot.

Only an instant Conner watched the Germans tugging and heaving. He felt like a man in the grip of delirium.

"Quick, Joe! They'll blow us to hell if we don't ride 'em down!"

Slowly the .75's smoking muzzle swung in line. Conner had a confused glimpse of a white-faced sergeant in a dirty undershirt wrenching at the cannon's traversing gear. How far had they to go? Could they get there before the piece was ready to fire? Twenty feet away, ten feet! That yawning muzzle looked as huge and black as the tunnel!

All the gunners but the sergeant bolted as the tank roared up, but he, with a sharp motion of his right arm, jerked the lanyard. The roar as of a thousand boiler factories was in Conner's ears as the tank lurched violently forward—then an impenetrable darkness settled over him.

It was in the afternoon when the same brigadier who had spoken with the late Lieutenant Mosby strode up to inspect the remains of the batteries which had been called the "Morale Breakers." His eyes anxiously narrowed on discovering the wrecked Renault tank at the far end of the line of emplacements. Lying beside it were a couple of men in very dirty khaki overalls, both of them bandaged in several places.

"No, don't get up, men," said the

brigadier while his staff stared curiously. "What unit do you belong to?"

"Well, sir," Sergeant Conner grinned with that portion of his face which was visible. "We belongs to the 390th Tank Battalion."

"So? But how in hell did you get across the ridge after the other tanks failed?"

The brigadier's face was very intent, for he, if nobody else, realized that to these men, the gray-haired veteran in particular, was due the ultimate success of that morning's attack.

"Well, sir," mumbled Sergeant Conner, "we done it by following a mottor us tank men have got."

"And what's that?"

"Over, under, around or—through! We doped out there must be a railroad tunnel."

"Hell, sir," objected Joe, "the sergeant here did all the dopin'."

"So you came through the tunnel?"

"Yes, sir."

The brigadier smiled. "Well, sergeant, that's a good motto. 'Over, under, around or through!' As there will be decorations and promotions for both of you, I'd say you better leave out the 'through' part—because you're far from through."

THE END.



Houses Made of Opals

MOST of the fire opals in the world are mined in Mexico, coming from near the city of Durango. The entire region adjacent to this city is so rich in opaliferous deposits that traces of the mineral may be clearly seen in the stone used for construction purposes there. In fact, Queretaro is sometimes called the City of Opals because so many of its houses are built of rock containing bits of this precious stone. When the sun shines brightly in Durango the houses flash nearly every color in the rainbow. Thus it is that many a poor Mexican often obtains from the walls of his home a novel display unduplicated elsewhere in the world.

Gerald FitzGerald.



"Get ready wit' the sub-machine gun!"

Dead-Line

Death lurked in every corridor of Menchero's vigilantly guarded mansion-fortress as Paul Standing bearded that evil genius of gangland in his den

By J. ALLAN DUNN

author of "Beyond the Law," "Looters' Luck," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

PAUL STANDING, who is telling the story, is routed from his safe New Jersey retreat by the return of a Mexican-Indian underworld leader, *El Capitán*, whose coming spells danger to Standing and the society girl he worships, Kate Wetherill. Under the name of Menchero, the gang chief is planning to seize a gold shipment, and use the wealth to become dictator of a Central American country, Contra Costa.

Standing had been Dick Pemberton; but when the Mexican fastened his own crime, the murder of Dick's benefactor Harvey Pemberton, on him and railroaded him to Sing Sing, the young man had escaped and changed his name and appearance. Now, as Paul Standing, he eavesdrops on Menchero; and the Mexican, failing in two attempts to kill him, turns him in to the police as Dick Pemberton. But Standing is able to show that his finger-prints

This story began in the *Argosy* for August 30.

(thanks to a brilliant job of skin grafting) are unlike Pemberton's.

CHAPTER VIII—(Continued).

A BUSY NIGHT.

THERE was no trace of the grafting that they could find, as I well knew—not for nothing had I spent that period of agony in the surgeon's care. I now dared give my seeming indignation full rein.

"I had been inclined to make a bargain with you," I fumed. "I meant to overlook this indignity as a good citizen, accepting the methods of the law. But when the law oversteps itself, I feel like standing on my own rights. They will be acknowledged. Threaten me with anything more at your own risk. Any further detention will have extremely unpleasant consequences—for you."

They hated to let me go. I once saw a fox that missed a rising duck by a split second. The wind had been right as I lay in my blind and he had not sensed my presence. But he looked around with a laughable expression of chagrin, as if in fear his failure might have been witnessed. He had bolted when I let out my glee.

I was not laughing now, but the commissioner looked exactly like that disappointed fox. He glanced about him; but after all it was his subordinates who had made him ridiculous. He scowled at them, scowled at the lieutenant as he came in again.

"Your methods strike me as rather arbitrary," I went on. "Any citizen of the same apparent build as some one you want, though otherwise totally unlike him, is likely to be dragged in. I should advise you to adopt other tactics. But I suppose you mean well. I

am still willing to call it off, providing I am not molested further."

Whatever promises he might make along that line would not be kept. They would have me shadowed. But I was ready for that.

"You are not giving out any story to the papers to discredit this department?" he asked at length. "We are obliged at times to be arbitrary."

That was as much of an apology as could be expected. His egotism was bruised, almost as much as my body would have been, internally, under their third degree.

"No one will have my story—except my lawyer," I said. "He will keep in touch with me and if I am bothered, if I am detained, he will know what to do and where to look for me. Otherwise, if you will give me those prints of my own fingers, commissioner, I will bid you good evening, immediately."

I breathed easier when I left that Centre Street mousetrap. The sergeant on duty got me a cab. I had no more fear of Menchero. He had seen me landed. The shadows I had seen from my window might have been his men, waiting for my arrest, or they might have been sent from headquarters. It did not matter.

I tore up the prints and scattered them from the cab window. Back at my rooms I took the wig, which I did not mean to wear again. I must get rid of it. I got my gun and destroyed the note to Flatty. They might search there; no sense in chancing it. Flatty would not betray me. I knew who his mouthpiece was, a man of intense discretion, a fox who did not miss his ducks. I could telephone him before I left for Red Point, at office or residence, and be fairly sure of finding him. He found all his entertainment in his profession, with more drama and

comedy than in any theater—and he was well paid for it.

I TOOK a crosstown car, and a dick got on. His shoes gave him away, but he had many other signs of his calling. He was too obviously unaware of me, spread out an evening paper and used it as cover, seated at the far end of the car, his reflection plain in the window.

I had time enough to fool with him a little, to catch him tailing me. I transferred to an uptown car and he took a cab. At Columbus Circle I got out, crossing the wide space north, then hurrying west as if I was bound for the subway kiosk in the middle of the street. He was after me in a rush.

Shadowing a man in the subway is a difficult task.

I bought a paper, went inside, stood there and turned to meet him.

"I don't like the way you're following me," I said. "I'm going across the street to telephone. First, to the commissioner. If he's gone, I'll phone straight to the *Tribune*. If you don't know what that means, the commissioner does."

The commissioner's evening, whatever he had planned before he came down town to score his triumph, had been spoiled. He would still be at Centre Street, waiting to hear what had become of Menchero. Menchero would not be making himself obvious in New York again, I fancied. That shop would be under suspicion. But Menchero was by now on the way to his meeting.

The dick hesitated. No doubt he had a fair idea of what had happened. I told him he had better come along, and he did. I got the call through to headquarters.

"Call off this ill-bred lawhound of

yours, commissioner," I said. "Standing speaking. You're not keeping your end of the bargain. I won't, the next break you make. You might as well put your plain-clothesmen in uniform. This one walks like a promoted patrolman."

The dick stood in the booth entrance with a crimson face. I might have been a trifle indiscreet, perhaps my talk was too sophisticated, but I had the commissioner where I wanted him and I was beyond his reach unless, as Standing, he got me for some new offense. Then I was going to be sorry. I had to be careful in the future, with the things I had to do. As far as the past was concerned I was beyond the law.

"He wants to speak with you," I told the dick, and he took the receiver. I bought some cigarettes. A minute later he lurched out of the booth and the store and I watched him take the subway, down town. It was not unlikely that he would soon be treading sidewalks in the Bronx, for poor sleuthing. The commissioner was apt to be harsh on failures other than his own.

I got Flatty's mouthpiece, who gave me a private number to call back. I did not give any name. "Flatty will know," I told him. He had not yet heard from Flatty. They were holding him without privileges, but the attorney would get through to him. Flatty would do the rest. I knew he was thoroughly dependable.

The subway roared uptown, an express, from which I changed to local and back to express again as I got a flying chance. When I came up to the surface I knew I was in the clear. My cab let me out six blocks from my destination. If the driver looked, he only saw me go into the lobby of an apart-

ment house, but he swung off swiftly and I emerged again.

At the end of my walk a car was waiting. "Red" Durgan was inside, a man of his at the wheel. I told him what I wanted of him more definitely, gave him a roll of bills which he did not count. We had done business before.

"The outfit's wit' you as long as you want us," he said. "We're restin' as the actors say. Got so the game ain't so good round New York, by water. They ain't copped me wit' the goods, but I'm gittin' tired of changin' the tub all over. It don't make any difference if you look like a scow or a yacht these days. I'm thinkin' of sellin' her. Honest! Flyin' looks better to me. Up Canada way. Not hooch, either. I can buy me what I want cheap. Viking seaplane, three-fifty h. p."

"What about flying it?"

"Chief, I can run anything with engines in it, land, sea, under it, or air. An' I've solo'd, plenty. Got to keep up wit' the times."

He was telling the truth. An adventurer Red Durgan, with the buccaneer's twist, like Billings in that, but a different type. Reckless but efficient, laughing at the law because of its blundering working, defiant of it because of his spirit of unrest and his knowledge of the law's devious methods.

"The big guys git theirs, an' I'm gittin' mine," was his philosophy. "An' I like a fast game."

We halted and got out beside a hoarding that enclosed waste land, long offered for sale. Red watched, listened. There was a low whistle and a shadow drifted up to us, past us. The way was clear. We went through two boards that swung doorwise, down a

bank. There was a heap of rubbish, old cans and containers, light pieces of worthless junk that even a peddler would despise.

The heap resolved itself into a stout door to which the junk was fastened. Bent double, we went through a clayey tunnel and came out under a wharf. The boat was there.

"I've got guns aboard," said Red. "Two Thompson subs an' plenty gats. Best not to trot 'em out till we're across the Sound. You better git into some dungarees while I look at that chart of yours. I know pretty well where we're goin'. You got to know the Sound, both shores as well as the Hudson an' the East River, in my racket. Fog an' all. Too bad there ain't any fog to-night, but you can't git all the breaks. Likely to be some before mornin'. There's fog outside."

He sent a man off in a dinghy to reconnoiter, paddling away under the wharf to peer through an opening. I donned my overalls. The adventure was on. There would be five men with us, besides Durgan and myself. I didn't want any better.

I was vouched for and they would be stanch. They too liked a fast game, though most of this deal I must play alone.

The way was clear. So was the night, though there was high scud slightly veiling the stars; that might lower later on. The opening widened and we hauled out, the engines starting sweetly, going at half-speed, almost loafing along.

"Might be overhauled," said Red. "If so, we're clean. There ain't even a pint aboard—where they can find it. Just a quart or so, tucked away fer later . . . Good night fer cruisin'," he said presently. "Those babies'll be on the lookout, but they got nothin' on us."

We were well out on the Sound before we were bothered, just starting to swing north. The rum-chaser came along with a bone in her teeth, making thirty-five knots. We were still traveling at twenty-five. It was not yet eleven o'clock. To run full speed invited attention and we had obtained that anyway.

"I know that bird," said Red. "We could run rings round him but he'd only trail us, put some one else on. They got radios, all of 'em. Better let him draw a blank, chief." It was up to Red, as skipper, wise in the ways of Customs men. I put some grease on my face and hands. In the dirty dungarees, with an old cap well down, I looked like one of them.

RED slowed down to the hail and the runner came surging up. Men were on the alert to board us. There was a quick-firer trained on us. "Like a lot of firemen," said Red. "Crazy to raise hell. Sore if they don't git a chance. How's tricks, Henderson? What are you botherin' me fer? I told you I'd quit."

"Yeah! So you did." Henderson's tone was mocking.

They swarmed aboard, jamming guns against us, frisking us for ours. Finding none, they were furious, suspecting a trick. They went all over the boat and it was plain it was not their first boarding-party on this launch.

"You got her all painted up again," said the petty officer in charge, bull-necked, bull-headed. "You're up to somethin', Red."

"I'm sellin' her, I tell you. Takin' her to Bridgeport to deliver her an' collect. Of course I painted her. I'm sorry, Henderson, but I can't offer you nothin' stronger than gasoline, this trip."

They prowled about, tapping, testing partitions, measuring them to see if they had been thickened, loath to call it off.

"Any time you're through," said Durgan wearily. "You guys never know when a fella's talkin' straight."

Henderson gave him a dirty look. He still had us rounded up, some in the engine room under the hood, some in the cockpit as we drifted side by side.

"I'll take a look in the bilge," he said. "An' I'll git you comin' back, Red."

"I expect to go back by train," Red answered. "Unless you spoil the sale by makin' me late. Help yourself."

They lifted floor boards, saw the dirty, greasy, evil-smelling bilge water slopping about by the light of their torches, ripped up some more planking while Red protested. Then they were through.

"I'll git you yet, Red," said the boatswain.

"Not till you fly sea-cops take to the air," Red retorted. "An' that takes nerve."

The boarding officer dropped his hand to his gun, his eyes narrowed, his face ugly.

"Go on an' shoot. Only—shoot straight. I don't want to be all mussed up. You're just a four-flusher, Henderson," he added, looking straight at the other. "You got to be backed up with a uniform an' a quick firer. I see they disrated one of you birds down in Florida the other day fer bein' too quick on the trigger. If you were on a racket of your own you'd be a stool pigeon. Git the hell off my boat!"

He knew his man.

"Some day!" said Henderson, as they shoved off.

"Yeah. Some day. Ter-morrer, maybe; it's allus comin'. Good night!"

"As we started off again, Red said: "He ain't got the right kind of head on him. His brains are ham-fat an' they catch fire easy. He's got jest sense enough to know it. Make him sore, when he ain't got anything on you, an' he'll crawfish. At that, he'll radio Bridgeport. Lot of good it'll do him."

The rum-chaser started east, we went on north.

"**W**E won't likely be bothered again to-night," said Red.

"She's bound around Montauk Point. Goin' to look over the south side of Long Island, chasin' tip-offs. We might as well unload the armory. Those guys don't know everything. They can't see the bottom for the bilge."

A hose was flipped into the greasy water and it was sucked up. Red lifted some more boards, brought out a long case of wood, fished some more and got six quart bottles. The case was waterproof, the liquor was good Scotch.

"A little drink won't do any of us any harm," he said. "This is no faked Dutch potato alky. Can't carry much of it down there though. Git those guns assembled, boys."

There were a dozen automatics, more than we needed. Two sub machine guns with drums of ammunition were soon in place. Red insisted on my taking one of the pistols.

"Everything's muffled," he said. "If we have to shoot, you can't hear 'em fifty yards erway. An' then they sound like motorboat bang-offs. Trade this for yours." It fitted the clip and I made the exchange.

We took our drinks and Red and I went out on deck. The mist was lowering though a stiff breeze swung in from seaward, held it high.

"It'll fog up before mornin'," he said. "I looked at the barometer. Due fer a change. It'll be a dirty day in New Yawk ter-morrer."

I did not answer. A dirty day. It would help Menchero, if that was when he brought off his coup. That transportation problem of his puzzled me. He had talked of millions in gold. A million weighed close to two tons. How was he going to hide it or finally remove it?

A plane soared overhead with a roar. Red looked up.

"There's a good boat," he said. "Amphibian, got landing gear tucked up between her pontoons. Douglas, Pratt and Whitney Wasp engines, most likely. That means four-twenty-five h. p. She can do a hundred an' thirty full out, cruise at a hundred, land at forty. Interchangeable landin' gear. Can carry four passengers. That's a skyboat for you."

"How much dead weight cargo could she pack, Red?" I was wondering if this was Mendez's plane. She was far ahead of us, on our course.

"With gas fer a short trip, stripped down? I dunno. Three thousand pounds easy. She's flyin' low 'count of the fog. Got a ceilin' of sixteen thousand, that baby!"

He was enthusiastic. I dismissed my vagrant fancy. If that was Mendez's plane bound for the rendezvous, she was carrying no gold to-night. It was all premature, that line of thought.

"How did you come to quit flying?" I asked.

Red chuckled.

"I had a frail. A blonde. I was lookout fer the rum fleet. Good money an' I liked the game. She said she was scared to lose me. Well, I lost her. She did some flyin' on her own. I wasn't home enough nights to furnish

her the entertainment an' the attention she needed. I'd sold the ship an' bought the launch. Made more dough, but that jane would have put the mint on the blink. I fell fer her but I picked myself up. Say, chief; that plane is set fer close to where we are. He can't use that cove though. Too twisty. He'll go ashore in a boat. See him—he's scootin' down back of that island."

WHEN we got there the plane was riding at anchor. It looked like the Mendez ship, but that was not material. He was ashore long ago. I saw a wooded hill, lights in a house at the foot of it. As we nosed in, I watched my chart, which was unnecessary after all, since Red had another. But they checked.

Suddenly, from behind the other island, two boats came tearing for us. They must have been going close to fifty. Their bows lifted free. Racing craft—and we had draught and were following the channel. Inside the cove we might turn round, but not here.

They had us. They came surging up alongside, one to port and one to starboard.

"Twice in one night!" said Red. "I don't like it. How erbout it, chief?"

I didn't like it either, and said so. The plane might have warned against us, a craft headed this way. It might have been Menchero's own precautions.

"Stand by the guns, boys," said Red. "Git back there, two of you, wit' the subs. If it's rough stuff, let 'em have it."

Men were aboard on each side of us. They jumped into the cockpit.

"What are you carryin'?" roared one as he flourished a gun.

"Phonies!" Red yelled back. "Drive 'em, buddies."

He thrust his gun into the belly of one close beside him and pulled the trigger. I caught the other by his pistol-wrist. Even then Kate's appeal came to me. My left held his right and I slugged him with the muzzle of my own weapon, over the ear, as his gun went off. His was also muffled, I noticed. He fell like a handful of wet mud.

"Take 'em, buddies!" shouted Red.

Our men swarmed aft. I heard the subdued rattle of the sub machine guns, then they leaped aboard the two smaller launches. I heard Red laugh, the laugh of stimulation and achievement. He was in his own dimension. And it was all over.

"Wops!" said Red. "Three of 'em won't go back."

Three were dead, two wounded. Only one, cowering, hands up, was unscathed. But Red was wrong. They were not subjects of Italy, never had been. Cubans, or Contra-Costans. No evidence of authority about them. He had been right when he spotted the "revenue men" as phony.

I talked with the one sound man—not pleasantly. He had a gun barrel on his spine at the moment. Menchero's men, they were posing as Federal officials and making a bad job of it. No doubt they had been ordered to stop any craft coming toward the cove.

"We'll put the stiff's into one of the launches an' sink her," said Red.

Red talked words of wisdom, in this desperate hazard of mine. They had attacked us, the killing had been forced on us.

"We'll let Sandy take the rest to a dump I know," he went on. "They ain't hurt so bad. It 'ud be better to dump 'em all in the Big Drink at that; they tried to do us in."

His tone was ruthless, but I was still

in charge. The shooting had been inevitable, in self-defense, but I wanted no cold-blooded murder on my hands. There was no sign of disturbance ashore. The man I questioned said they were supposed to keep the water clear between the islands and the cove. They were not to report, unless there was a clash and they took suspicious prisoners. Now the shoe was on the wrong foot. They had not expected to tackle a gang like Red's.

"That's enough for to-night, Red," I said. "We'll have to hold them for a while, but we can do that."

"Sure. We'll stow 'em beyond Sachem Head. There's a place there ain't opened up, won't be fer two weeks. I know the caretaker. What you say goes, chief. They got a bellyful anyway. Sandy, you know where to go. Tow one an' sink her in twelve fathom with the stiffs. Better take Toothy erlong. He'll bore her. Git the centerbit, Toothy. See you both later."

The bucktoothed man climbed aboard one craft and Sandy the other. A tow rope was served, and they headed out.

"That's that," said Red. "None of us hurt. Quick work. Those subs laid 'em out. Let's have ernother shot of hooch. You still goin' to play this solo, chief?"

CHAPTER IX.

SPY-WORK.

THERE was no trouble as we went into the cove, making the bend.

There were trees on either side, the water was dark with shadow. The high mist was getting denser. I thought it might be difficult for the plane to get away again. To-morrow, if it was

dirty weather, if Menchero was counting on it as part of his transportation problem, he might run into difficulties. I said something of that. It seemed my aeronautic knowledge was limited.

"Fog don't count no more," said Red. "All new equipment's got a radio echo altimeter. You can record ground distance up to three thousand an' down to fifty. Recorder's on a cockpit panel. Green light flashes at two-fifty, yellor at a hundred, an' red at fifty. You got that an' a good compass, with radio bearin's or not, an' fog don't ermount to a damn."

He was standing forward of the housing, with me, peering right and left. He ran back suddenly and the launch stopped speed, hung in reverse against the incoming tide. I joined him.

"Looks like there might be a place to hide out over there," he said in a low voice. "We'll take a chance."

The dinghy went off to the shore, one man sculling swiftly. He investigated, disappeared, showed again. We backed in, branches scraping, to a tiny inlet that just held us. The boughs screened the launch completely.

"Know how long you're goin' to be?" asked Red. "No hurry. We'll stick around as long as you like. We got grub erlong."

"I don't know," I said. "Don't follow me up. If one can't get in, more would have a harder job. I don't want this game blown. There is something to be decided to-night, a job to be pulled to-morrow or the next day. I want to find out. If I don't get back in twenty-four hours, Red, you can figure I'm not coming."

"We'll wait thirty. May have to clear out of here, but we'll be around. That'll bring it up to dawn Saturday. If you don't show we'll look fer you."

I knew the odds against me. I had to depend on myself. If I disappeared I was not going to be easy to find.

They rowed me across the cove and I landed in marshy soil with enough tussocks to make the passage possible to where alders grew. Through these I made my way toward the house.

It was a beautiful old place. In the vague starlight the signs of neglect did not show. High pillars, broken at the second story by a balcony that did not extend to the wings. Pure colonial. Even without my map I could have placed its interior arrangement, though changes might have been made. Lights showed in a fanlight above the door, in windows back of the balcony across the full length of the central part. Windows that were only partly veiled by curtains. I saw a shadow crossing one of them.

There was no chance of looking in unless one climbed to a level. And if watchers were about, there was slight chance of doing that. Clapboards, no vines. A man might essay to clamber up one of the pillars and work his way to the balcony by the outer shutters and their ironwork holdbacks, but he would be exposed all the time.

THERE was a broken picket fence across the front of the grounds.

Back of that a stiff hedge of hemlock had run wild. Easy enough to wriggle in between the stems, there was a bare space from one to two feet.

But what beyond? A lawn that had been mowed, patches of shrubbery, laurels and peonies. Slight contours that might help for cover; but the whole outlook very chancy. If one got to the roof, the overhanging cornice stopped him, even aside from the guards I was sure were posted to spot an intruder and bring him down.

I hoped there were no dogs to bark. I had had experience with them once in connection with one of Menchero's late partners—dead now, "taken for a ride" by orders of *El Capitán* because he might talk; and I was not anxious to repeat.

It was probable these sentries would meet occasionally. A missing one would lead to investigation, immediate hue and cry. They had to be avoided.

Another shadow passed the lighted windows, not distinguishable. I had to go.

I still wore the dungarees; they and the cap blended with the night as I made the hedge, wriggling on my belly through dewy grass, gaining the outside of the hedge, listening.

There was a slight sound, very slight. Some one beyond the hemlock hedge, walking silently in sneakers. I saw the ray of a flash light. I had one of my own along, with the things from the hardware store. What I had heard was the click of the switch. The torch was hooded, focused down to a long beam. It could not be seen above the hedge, barely below it, as it swept back and forth and then was shut off in three short blinks to right and left. A signal that all was well?

But I had made up my mind to go round to the back. Too many hand-caps in front. I followed the hedge to the right. Once I crouched, hearing low voices, then turned the angle and went on. There were some ancient greenhouses, panes broken, doors open, sagging, all in disuse. A rain-washed gully with some young brush on the sides. I went along it with infinite caution on hands and knees, got into the first of the greenhouses with its stands of dirt-filled boxes in which weeds were sprouting. Under these to the second, the third.

Now I could see the back of the house, a stable. A light shone in one room at the far end. There had been a kitchen garden here once, but everything in the rear had been allowed to run riot and I got through the untended growth close to the wall of the house, along it, around steps outside the kitchen entrance, on till I was beneath the lighted window.

All windows in the rear, at least, were old-fashioned, with small panes. They would be hard to open, fastened by spring catches working in side-slots, like mine at Willowbrook, simple but efficient devices. The putty knife I had would not slip those. I might remove a pane. I had a glass cutter and a package of fly paper; but those catches had to be worked both sides at once.

I came across an old box, one of those divided to hold bottles of soda water, and I took it with me. It was fairly sound and should hold my weight. I became confident the guards were not patrolling the rear with any regularity, if at all.

THE room was paneled, with a fireplace in which logs were burning.

It was not a cold night to me, with my blood tingling, but the room's occupant sat close to the blaze as if he was cold. He was reading a magazine, glancing through a pile of them, mildly interested, smoking a short cheroot.

It was the man we had seen at the speakeasy, who I had fancied might be Mendez, the aviator. His Cuban blood needed the fire. I saw his profile clearly against the lamp on a stand the other side of the wing chair in which he lounged, toasting his shins.

It was his plane, then, outside. But why was he not in the conference upstairs?

Back to the kitchen entrance. Locked! Billings would have laughed at it, but I feared my methods might not be noiseless enough. There was one window, high up, as if to a pantry. Big enough for a man to squeeze through. I retrieved my box, set it down and then suddenly flattened back of it and some skimpy hydrangeas in a hollow made by raindrops from the eaves.

A beam came searching from the right, another from the left. They met, ranged a little, and shut off. Two men came together, betrayed by their voices when they met to talk in Spanish dialect.

"All clear?"

"Clear. It goes well. Have you *aguardiente*?"

A bottle, or a flask, passed. I heard the gurgle of liquor going down as I lay close as a snake to the dirt. A few more words followed. It was plain they considered patrolling the back was a perfunctory job. But I lay still for several minutes, wondering what I might be missing upstairs. The plan of the interior, as it had been, was clear in my mind with that of the old cellars.

My cutter ran smoothly over the glass without a squeak, the little wheel touched with oil. The fly paper held the square as I removed it, cut close to the putty. I could not replace it, but I doubted if the black void that must show instead of the shine of the glass, would be noticed. I hoped the brandy would hold out, dull their vigilance.

I was inside, feeling about—not using my torch until I should be well inside with a door behind me. I felt shelves, well laden, found a door—locked. The pantry was a modern addition. The walls were tongue-and-

groove, the door comparatively flimsy. Rains and droughts, lack of interior heating, had warped it. More than that, the hinges—from the inside—were a joke, the kind that are bound by a long tongue of metal topped by a knob. I did not need my torch to ease them out with the tool I had brought. A little levering and I lifted the door bodily aside, its lock still shot.

Through, I replaced it as best I could. In the wide hall I felt, rather than saw, space and darkness. Easy to lose sense of direction under such circumstances. Haste was needed but caution more.

Nothing was to be heard as I glided out, with both hands wide, groping, seeking the back stairs.

If my plan was correct there would be a big room back of the one where the conspirators were hatching their plot. If luck was with me there would still be folding doors between the rooms through which sound would leak.

I was forced to use my hooded ray for an instant. It revealed the stairs and I mounted, three treads, before I caught the sound of an opening door, directly beneath me, a door from under the stairs, leading to the cellars.

At the same instant a light was switched on, in the ceiling, the bulb dim and dirty but revealing. A man had come out, almost a dwarf, with long arms, a dark face hairy with unshaved beard, the face of the lowest type, flat-nosed, brutal, a hint of something Oriental in it.

He saw me as I saw him. His hand went to his belt and a knife was coming out as he leaped for the balustrade. I vaulted it, fair upon him, my hands at his corded throat.

I set out all my strength—and needed it. His legs twined round me in a scissors grip that bade fair to crush my

ribs as we rolled on the dusty floor together. His hands tore at my clutch while my fingers shut off his wind, probing back of his windpipe, seeking the jugular, stemming the flow of blood.

He fought convulsively with strength that seemed incredible. What breath was left in his lungs wheezed through his jaws with the stink of garlic. Slowly he weakened and then renewed the struggle with a burst of fury. He was hardly human, and he was strong as a chimpanzee. When I was finished with him I was spent, weak, breathless, aching from the squeeze of his legs.

I GOT up and hung onto the spindles, striving to control my laboring intakes of wind, still sound but exhausted. My will, the crisis of the moment spurring it, acted on my ganglia. Strength came back to me. I could hear nothing.

I worked swiftly, trussing him, then dragged him back to the pantry, setting the door aside. I thrust him in, senseless now, gagged against the time when he came to. Sooner or later he would be missed. For all I could do the forced door was obvious. I found the switch he had clicked and once more plunged the hall in darkness before I went upstairs.

As I expected, there was a short cross passage, ending in doors, one to the left wing, the other to a room back of where Menchero might now be telling the final essentials of his scheme. This door was partly open, ajar. It suggested a trap.

I had to risk the torch again. I screwed the focus to a pencil and sent the slim beam toward the top of the door. It flashed on metal. There was an ancient table by the wall at the head of the stairs, a rickety chair beside it.

I am tall and I found both sides of a washpan; a booby trap, childish in device, but devilishly efficient. If I had moved that door an inch it would have crashed down, laden with pottlids, odds and ends of cutlery, some old plates and jelly glasses. It might not have been Menchero's idea, but it was good. I lowered it with infinite care and set it in the doorway. Some one might step into it and so warn me.

Once the door was closed, I could see a sliver of light from the front. The room seemed vacant enough, but it was two precious minutes, listening to the mutter of voices, now high, now low, excited and controlled, before I risked the torch again.

Folding doors. Scattering furniture, on a big rug not quite in the center, nearer to the big doors. I suspected it and I folded it up. The parquet flooring showed little sign of any trap, but I skirted the margin marked by dust, laid my ear against a cracked panel.

I was in time—barely so. Menchero was recapitulating the plans. I listened, absorbed. Their daring was enormous, but that very daring might win out. No details had been overlooked. It was plain that Menchero must have been in New York, scheming, working, long before Fin discovered him.

The stake was gigantic—twelve millions in gold to be transferred from a down town bank below the dead-line to an important branch uptown, lately opened, where the vaults were more modern, invulnerable. It was a transfer not to be announced until it was over, carried out with precautions and without ostentation.

The man's mentality was colossal. There was a quirk in his intellect, but for which he might have achieved great heights. Because of that fatal twist he was an enemy to civilization. The

straight path had no attraction for him. Intrigue lured him to show his cleverness.

He had got his secret information through some one in the foreign exchange department of the bank, it appeared. But I did not hear the name of the institution nor the time set for the transfer.

There was but one flaw in his plans as I heard him recapitulate them. Risks, of course, but the only flaw was my unsuspected presence—if I could back it up with swift and unknown departure.

I waited only to hear more details, if they were forthcoming. An anonymous warning on my part might or might not be heeded in time. If I appeared in person I would be referred to Centre Street. I had no wish to return there and enter into lengthy explanations. I was not at all sure they had not found out by now that Flatty had been living at my rooms.

A flicker signal from the shore would bring over the dinghy from the launch. I had a shrewd notion that Red might be looking over the plane, but his men would be on the lookout. There was a landing stage that lacked water deep enough for the launch. The dinghy was safer, anyway.

"**W**HAT about this flyer chap?" asked some one. It sounded like the same man who had done most of the objecting at the speakeasy. I heard Menchero laugh.

"Mendez? He is downstairs. He is a peculiar person—a patriot who is intrigued with certain plans of mine, outside this country. He serves the cause of liberty—though he will be paid, paid well. But he has no actual share, as you have. A curious man, almost unique; born honest and has a

preference for remaining so. To-morrow he brings over enough of what we get to pay you your shares. Perfectly to be trusted, I assure you, or I would not employ him."

There was a touch of mockery in his voice, mocking at a man who could be honest and devoted to a cause. I believed him, though the statement opened up possible developments. If Mendez was honest—

There was some discussion. Menchero broke in authoritatively. Some wanted the gold handled differently. He thundered at them, dominated them. I could hear his fist hitting the table.

"You are fools! It is the only way. All others will be blocked. They do not yet police the air effectively. These are my plans and they have been worked out to the last detail. Do your parts and leave the rest alone. I shall be in touch with you, you with me. Do you think I would be fool enough to consider treachery toward you? Agree, or the game stops, here and now. Some of it cannot be played without me, in person, as you know. All of it shall be done according to my plans, or not at all."

There was silent acquiescence. They were a lawless lot. The loot was almost in sight and it dazzled them. They wanted more, they grudged him his major share, but he had mastered them. I knew their types of mentality. A superior mind could set his spell on them. As for the foreigners, Contra-Costans or Mexicans, they were allied with Menchero in future enterprise to which this coup was the golden key. It was his strong-arm men, his gunmen, who had been inclined to be unruly.

"There's one more thing," said one of them. "An' it's damned important.

There's to be six cars, outside the decoys. You claim there won't be any motor cycle squad, outside of the gang thet guards the loadin'. But suppose there is? Suppose they change their mind? Then what? If they trail us?"

"My friend," said Menchero in the voice he intended to be soothing, but which irritated with its assumption of superiority—the very superiority that held them in check—"you have never played the game called chess? No? I have. In it you look far ahead, not only for what you plan, but for what the other side may do unexpectedly. Listen..."

He lowered his voice slightly and I took a step or two toward the opening of the doors, to hear the better. This was indeed important.

Something gave way slightly under my feet, a tilting of one of the blocks of the parquet flooring. It was enough. A gong rang shrilly. The room I was in was flooded with light. Back of me, where the rug had been, yawned a black square in the flooring.

More light from the front room. Ten men standing there about the long table. I took them all in at a glance. Menchero, four more of his own racial affinity, five gangsters. Ten men, and ten guns trained on me.

Men back of me were coming in from side doors or panels. I did not look at them, but one, who came running from the outer hall, stepped into the pan I had set down and sprawled, the utensils clattering. I devoutly hoped he would slide into the open trap.

It was a miracle I was not riddled, then and there. It was Menchero's desire for knowledge that saved me, with his stentorian shout. With him a prisoner was never to be shot until probed for information, and he must have

been furiously puzzled to account for my appearance.

He did not know me at first, in my dungarees, the grease still on my face, the cap pulled down. He glared, then laughed.

"Drop your gun," he ordered, "or we make a sieve of you. Now search him thoroughly. Wipe off his face. Where is that fool who fell?"

CHAPTER X.

IN THE CELLARS.

THEY held me while they searched me, from head to foot, although they did not take off any of my clothes, nor did they remove my shoes, only felt to see if I had a knife or other weapons there.

For a moment Menchero left me alone, questioning the follower who had tripped. Menchero's face snarled as he pressed the inquisition, his eyes were evil and he constantly fingered the gun he had brought out on the alarm. The man's eyes were riveted on it.

It had been no order of Menchero's that rigged that booby-trap—a device intended to let the man Sancho take his watch more casually.

"Where," Menchero demanded, "was Vittorio, who was to have guarded the lower floor?"

He sent a man down to look for him. I knew where they would find him—and how.

"I have told you to obey my orders, to do no more and no less," said Menchero pitilessly to Sancho. "This is the second time you have chosen to disobey. The stakes are too large in this game to permit of disobedience. So."

The wretch fell to his knees, imploring mercy, as Menchero deliberately shot him between the eyes. He fell,

twitching for a moment, with Menchero looking down on him, frowning. The others looked on, unmoved.

"He is only a *cholo*," said Menchero. "There is plenty of room in the cellars for him to be buried. And Vittorio also."

"Vittorio tackled me," I said, nauseated at this wanton murder. It did not presage well for me, but I had not expected anything else if I was caught. "I got the best of him. You'll find him tied up—gagged, in the pantry, where I entered."

"You plead for him? And who pleads for you?" Menchero's voice held sarcasm.

My voice had roused him, but as yet he could hardly credit me for whom I was, the man he had left on the inexorable road of return to the penitentiary. They had roughly wiped off my features with my own handkerchief, snatched off my cap, and he stared at me. I swear there was a trace of admiration in his eyes that soon vanished. His face became as sardonic and sinister as a devil's mask worn by an Aleutian *shaman*. He began to laugh, shaking with unuttered mirth.

"*Dios!* It is a pity you and I could not be allied, Pemberton. I don't know how you got away from the commissioner. I don't care much, now that you are here. It may prove more amusing. But you have brains as well as luck, it seems. The luck, you have come to the end of. Your brains will soon cease to function. But first I shall give them something, let us say, to entertain them."

"You make a mistake, as the commissioner did," I said. "The same one. But it does not matter. I am Paul Standing. There is no Richard Pemberton."

I could see the gangsters regarding

me with speculative eyes. As Pemberton they had a sneaking regard for me, nothing compared with the business in hand, nothing I could count on. I had trespassed. I was defeated—doomed. Not very much more alive than the body of Sancho. A few hours, perhaps, or minutes, before the mechanism of my own body, beating so strongly now, ceased to function. I had bid for game and failed to make contract.

The penalties were not light. And Kate?

My hope there lay that Menchero with his loot, would depart for his republic that he meant to make a kingdom in all but name. With me gone, he might not bother her.

THAT hope dwindled as he stood facing me with his red tongue-tip showing between his teeth, mirth in his eyes. He turned to his fellows as two men took up the corpse of Sancho.

"This, my friends," he said, "is largely a personal matter between this gentleman and myself. A feud of old standing. I promise you he will be well taken care of. Very well indeed. We are nearly through the meeting. I am flying back; there is room for two more in the plane, or you can go in your cars. When our little demonstration is accomplished we will gather here tomorrow—after dark, discreetly. I shall then pay off all debts in full, including that to my uninvited guest, who calls himself Paul Standing... Ah, Vittorio! Are you not invincible?"

They had brought up the man I had fought, unbound him.

The dwarf stood stolid. His eyes shot in my direction with a malign glint of satisfaction, but he must have met the body of Sancho on the way up and he was ill at ease.

"Vittorio! I shall place you outside the only door through which this man may escape. It will be well locked, but he seems to possess faculties for breaking out. If he does—you, Vittorio, if he leaves you alive, are going to be very sorry for yourself. You understand?"

Menchero spoke in Spanish. The dwarf shivered, lost his stolidity.

"You will have to wait, Pemberton, for the moment," Menchero went on, to me. "Then we will arrange your temporary residence, though it may be your permanent one. Ah, here they come."

The men who had borne off Sancho had returned.

"There are tools downstairs," said Menchero. "Let this man see the burial of Sancho—as chief mourner. He is tricky, so be careful of him. I do not want him damaged, yet. I shall be down presently."

It was like a nightmare in which I persistently fought for—and retained—my full faculties, though I did not see how they could help me. We went to the deep cellars, smelling of damp earth and brick and mold. We passed through two, with Vittorio my personal guard. He held the prick of his knife steadily between my ribs.

"Were it not for Señor Menchero, I would rip you open like a fish," he muttered, in his own tongue.

I answered him with a whisper in the same language as we walked in that grim procession:

"If I had told Menchero you came up from the cellars, you would be in the same grave with Sancho."

I let him digest that truth. A scurvy card in the pack, Vittorio! I had small idea I could use him, but I was desperate enough. And even deuces, if they are trumps, may decide a game. He

had been prowling for liquor while I had made my entrance and opened that pantry door with the gods plucking puppet strings.

I knew that Menchero had no value for a life, when it could not serve him. There had been no sign of disapproval among his own men and the hard-faced, hired gangsters when he shot Sancho. But I had a hunch it was not all staged for discipline. He had planned to let me see it and then the interment, with the prescience that before long, I would be another victim to be stowed away in those moldy cellars.

He meant to weaken me. He had the mind of a torturer. He could gloat over my hours of apprehension, long hours of certainty as to my own ultimate fate, with promise of matters in between that would heighten my torment.

I was not to be killed outright. He wanted to let me know he had succeeded in the plans I could no longer foil—and his designs included Kate. I had read it in his eyes, in that mocking tongue-tip. If he had not already laid coils to ensnare her, he had them in mind. To possess her, and add to my bedevilment.

IT is not too easy to witness the burial of a man when you know that you are also marked for death. I stood erect, but the sweat started on my forehead as I watched them dig into the dirt, opening up the grave. Sancho had had a quick release. Not so for me. And what for Kate? There are worse things than death, for a woman.

I prayed—and I do not pray often—that she might avoid his trap, with a sickening feeling that she would not, with the knowledge that Menchero, all the time, back in his facile, devilish

brain, was imagining my sensations, calculating on them, feeding the demon that possessed his soul.

It took them hours, it seemed to me, to dig that hollow. The cellar was unpaved, but the ground was hard. They jested as they worked by the light of lanterns, using crowbars to break the surface. Sancho, dead, was already forgotten as an object lesson. They were a grim lot of ghouls.

They flung the body in, filled the gap with the broken soil and trod it down above the unshrouded corpse. They stank of sweat and garlic and they had no more emotion than toads. There was nothing much on Sancho they coveted though they searched his clothes and grumbled because there was no money. One of them took the dead man's knife, another a silver ring he wore.

With me it would be different. So far there had been nothing for them. They had found my wallet with four hundred and fifty dollars in it that Menchero had pouched. The maps I had destroyed. There was a five-hundred-dollar bill for emergency inside each of my socks and they were silk. They would acquire those unless Menchero was present at my stripping. But now they took small notice of me. Later, if they were to be my undertakers, they would divide my clothing.

Sancho buried, they led me back, through a cellar that held a rusty furnace, some coal and wood, a bin in which bottles showed—doubtless those for which Vittorio had been scouting—and left me to the mercy of that bandit while they went up to report.

I was helpless against that open blade. Vittorio, unarmed, was too close a match for me and now he was on guard. He felt the edges of his long knife.

"You speak my language," he said. "If I had got at this, *señor*, when we first fought, you would now be eating dirt with Sancho."

"I am not eating it yet, Vittorio," I said. "If I could tell you where to get a thousand dollars, a thousand Cuban *pesos*, in good money, how would you feel about a bargain?"

His face twitched. He was sorely tempted. For a moment I thought I was about to win.

"I should not live to spend it," he said finally.

"I passed through the guards. I can pass them again. I will take you with me. I will also buy you passage on a steamer to wherever you want to go. I will give you the money within an hour."

His face fell. I saw that he held slight thought of playing fair. He had hoped to see the money in hand.

"Five thousand *pesos* more before you sail," I said.

"You do not know Menchero."

"Menchero will not bother, if you set me free."

His was a dull mind. The fear of Menchero dominated it. To him *El Capitán* was supreme; had he not captured me? I saw his brain chewing the chances, like a cow its cud.

"If I saw the money?" he said cunningly.

I was unbound. Menchero was sure of me, now I was in his toils. I calculated that if I could hold Vittorio's gaze with the bill I took from a boot, I might tackle him; decided against it as I saw the low cunning in his eyes by the lantern's uncertain light. He would kill; say I had attempted to escape. Even if I won I would have scant chance to get out of those cellars.

"As soon as we are free from the house," I said, "a thousand *pesos*. Five more, later. You will be a rich man."

I tempted him. He was thinking hard of what he could do with that fortune, faltering...

It was too late. A light showed. Menchero was descending. Vittorio stiffened, his knife in the open, guarding me. Menchero's hand held a gun.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Nootka Indians Afloat

THE canoes used by the Indians at Hecate Straits, British Columbia, are hollowed from spruce logs, yet they have the trim lines of the conventional canoe, aside from being a bit less sheer at the ends. It is a pretty sight to see one of these lithe, unpainted craft slide along the quiet waters of the fiord with a red-clad Indian guiding it. What strikes the nautical mind especially is that it is so heavily laden with nets that the freeboard is but a scant inch; and it is even more surprising that the muffled chug-chug of an engine should sound from its primitive hold. It is also a novel picture when the tiny ship moors to the Imperial Oil Company's float and discharges, as though by legerdemain, young squaws, old squaws, innumerable brown babies and fuzzy dogs and yards of bright clothing, from the minute recesses of the canoe.

Alan Osbourne.



*The Cajan was beating the dog with a length
of old rubber hose*

Smoke Segrue

*Bart Segrue had fine plans for his estate in the Cajan piney
woods of Alabama; but his path led through tangled
jungles of ignorance, prejudice and jealousy*

By **ANTHONY M. RUD**

BRR - RR - UH - CHUCK - UH -
CHUCK!

The old-fashioned broad gauge Ford just made it, that time. The three tall men in the back seat slid about unfamiliarly. They scowled and looked frightened. It had been their first automobile ride.

Where the ox-cart ruts in red clay dissolved in another rain-smoothed bosom of white sand, Bart Segrue

stopped his laboring motor. Vaulting from beneath the wheel, he landed on the toes of his cordovan boots. Reaching back, he lifted out a loaded service automatic. It had dangled in an open holster back of his right knee. Now he wiped it carefully and buttoned it in the leather against his hip.

"End of the line. All out!" he called cheerfully, motioning to the trio of tall Cajans.

Like carpenter's rules unfolding, these barefooted men of the piney woods slid out the narrow door, long arms dangling. Round-shouldered, half-clad in overalls and undershirts, they towered above the five feet nine inches of Bart Segrue. Yet their faces went vacant once the scowls of worry were erased. Lips fell loose, betraying the inbreeding which had gone on for nearly two centuries—ever since their Acadian ancestors, kin of the fabled Evangeline of Longfellow's poem, had been snatched from their farms and homes at Grand Pré, Chignecto, Port Royal, and exiled to this wilderness of Southland.

True, the Choctaws and Creeks, tallest and best-natured of North American aborigines—for all of the bloody war the Creeks later waged against the whites—had been kind to those bewildered farmers and tradesmen brought by the great sea-bird with white wings. The Indians had been generous with help. Later they had intermarried with the white visitors. This allowed the Acadians to survive.

Yet in the end this very survival proved a curse. In their high cheek bones, their skins of muddy gold, were stigmata which had made them a race apart—shunned, hated and hating. In this modern day, when they could look into the bright Alabama sunshine, and see a goose-V of seaplanes out of Pensacola thundering along from nowhere to nowhere, many of them did not even comprehend the magic of the automobile or the telephone.

Only a minority of them could read, or sign their names. Southern white men denied Cajan children the right to attend white schools. The Cajans themselves refused to attend Negro schools. And the Cajans had no schools of their own, despite the eloquent pleas

of one far-seeing Governor of the State.

Thus it was that the Cajans remained for most part illiterate, suspicious, murderous—holding to a belt of barren woodland like grim death. It was the last refuge of nearly ten thousand outcasts.

As yet little vestige of law had come to this county. Elections and tax collecting remained in the shotgun stage. The county seat was a huddle of paintless shanties off a bayou of the Tombigbee River. And for these reasons Bart Segrue had been able to acquire one thousand two hundred and eighty acres of piney woods for just about his nerve in wanting them—plus a few highly desirable damyank dollars.

HERE is the money. You will distribute it according to our agreement, to those of your families who have been working." Bart unsnapped three hooks from an arm sling beneath the open neck of his flannel shirt, and drew forth three heavy, dull-clinking canvas bags. These contained silver half dollars fresh from the bank at Citronelle.

It was pay for the unskilled clans of Cajans who were clearing the oak scrub, pine, blue gum, cypress and palmetto from Segrue's second-growth acres. Pay for men, women and children well-nigh strangers to currency, who handled only the small amounts they received from whites or blacks for the Cajans' illicit corn-and-cane-scum shinny. Pay, the price of sanctuary—perhaps the means toward a new and broader life in the brotherhood of mankind!

The last really appealed to Bart Segrue. Without the Cajans as squatters throughout the woods, his problems would have been ordinary enough.

Yet if success for himself, Molly and the kid could also bring about some measure of mental and economic release for this woods folk he had come to know, the greater struggle was handsomely worth while.

And from the drop of a hat it had been a struggle indeed! Back in Citronelle, the nearest town of another, richer county, lived Seth Odom. Through Odom's store the Cajans had made most of their small purchases for a generation.

Old Seth, now that he was sitting back more and more on the gallery of his big white house on the hill, leaving the management of his store, mills, turpentine stills and other properties to his grown sons, disliked changes. Particularly he disliked to see an outsider attempt to start a new order of things which in time might upset the reliable shiftlessness of his many Cajan customers.

They were getting newspapers now! Lon Bisby, the rural route carrier, actually brought out half a dozen of the largest Sunday papers each week, dumping them at the end of the road. There were catalogues, too, big volumes from the Chicago mail-order houses—ever the dread of the small town storekeeper's heart.

"It's yo' doin', young man!" Seth had accused, on the occasion of his first meeting with Bart Segrue. "It won't come to any good, yo' messin' out thataway in the woods. I'm tellin' yo'!"

With that he strode away, not waiting for reply. Bart grinned after the martial, white-mustached town capitalist. Seth had been born during the week of Antietam; and the War Between the States had been fought into his very fiber. If there was one of God's meaner creatures he hated worse than a red-

bug under his fingernail, it was the sight of a damyank deviling around.

Bart thought he was doing it, too. He knew that every scrap of those papers and catalogues was handed around, puzzled over, discussed gravely, and worn out in the reading. And while he still was negotiating for labor on his new acres, two or three of the more sophisticated Cajans had inquired timidly concerning the way of sending out for bits of merchandise quoted at these incredibly low prices.

Partway toward his object! First stir a demand, then offer a chance at the dollars which would bring even the simplest of these pictured marvels. And thus in time would be cleared, plowed and harrowed these woods acres ideal for pecan trees.

Great paper-shell Schley pecan trees in rows, thirty to the acre. Between the rows luscious Satsuma oranges, Floridas, kumquats, grapefruit and lemons, some of them grafted on the spiny, tough torment of shrubs, the *trifoliata*. Twenty or thirty acre tracts, each with a small house or bungalow of painted pine or creosoted cypress, to suit the wishes of a customer.

But all that was a dream as yet, probably years from realization. As his three money-bearing Cajans melted into the moss-hung, jasmine-scented aisles of the woods, Bart stood there in the vestigial road, an ox-cart trail disappearing in the smothering sand.

THIS day his business had to do chiefly with water. Throughout southern Alabama the clay is red with iron rust; and the rivers of any size are muddy with the clay. Up here Bart Segrue had located one definite trickle of clear, cold water, flowing through his land. Puppy Creek, they called it.

In defiance of natural tradition it emptied itself later into the turgid bosom of Dog River; but above Bart's land an ancient and useless logging dam backed up most of its moisture into a series of heavily wooded swamp branches and a fetid, green-scummed "moccasin crawl."

"That crawl doesn't do Seth Odom a particle of good," reflected Bart. "It would make me a lake, three-four acres—maybe five—in extent."

Striding out into the thicker scrub, where close-thatched anise held up its maroon-starred barriers, he made for the natural sandy basin where in times of flood Puppy Creek expanded into a temporary lake.

The basin was even larger than he had supposed. With a small dam at the lower end, there would be a permanent lake here in the center of his property, nine or ten acres in extent, and running from three to fifteen feet in depth. It would not become dirty and stagnant, because of its sand and gravel bottom. The one thing necessary would be the purchase of Seth Odom's old logging-mill site, or permission to blow the dam which had been on the property since brass-check peonage days.

Bart had tried. Seth Odom, squatting upstream like a hoary, malignant spider, had refused unequivocally. Here was one place among many where he could harass and hamper the dam-yank; and he took a fierce delight in so doing.

Secretly he put a shotgun guard at the dilapidated mill of nights. But Bart, mingling with Cajans of the vicinity, soon heard of it, and shook his head. He had no intention of starting a war of dynamite and buckshot such as raged periodically over the laws concerning the dipping of sheep and cattle.

Crossing the foot-deep stream on a fallen cypress, Bart stopped to flip an imaginary fly. He would stock this lake-to-be with trout, bass, chinquapin perch...

At that moment a frown came to his forehead. He stiffened, listening. In this backwater of the world he had heard such sounds as came to him all too often, yet they never failed to stir anger.

Faint, yet distinct enough so that he recognized it as well as though he were an eye-witness, came the thumpings of repeated blows, and the *ki-yi-ing* of a dog hurt unto death. Mixed with this was a throaty rumble, a human voice distorted by rage. Rage, yes—and probably shinny.

With a growled ejaculation Bart scrambled across and made for the sound. He wondered, with angry disgust, why the destitute Cajans kept so many dogs, anyway. Particularly when the animals held no place of affection; were simply scavengers like the black, neckless buzzards, to be beaten at any or no excuse.

The scene, when he came upon it, was sickening. There, cringing upon the white sands of a sunlit glade, was a large gray and white dog—a female that looked as though she might have some pointer and great Dane ancestry. She was tied by the neck to a ground-ambling root of magnolia; and over her, staggering this way and that with the force and uncertainty of liquored exertion, a big man in overalls flailed her mercilessly with a length of hose.

A chunky, three-months-old gray puppy, unhurt as yet, lunged after her, whimpering. Bart saw the larger dog's bloodshot eyes, noted with a welling of red rage that her hind quarters dragged useless as she sought to evade the murderous blows.

No thought now of any mealy-mouthed tenets of fair fight! Muscles cording, Bart sprang forward. A heavy swing of right fist smashed into the cheek bone of the Cajan bully, who reeled away. A glancing, poorly aimed left; then a crunching right uppercut. The wood-billy lifted to his toes, then fell forward, twitching.

Bart snatched up the hose, but restrained himself. He smelled at it, then threw it away as a thing unclean. At some recent time it had been used as the worm for a shinny still; the acrid stench remained in it. Probably some of the results of the mash-cooking lay there on the ground at his feet.

The beaten dog looked up piteously at the newcomer. She tried to crawl nearer, but subsided in a voiceless gasp of pain.

Bart lifted out the automatic from its holster, and sent one heavy slug crashing through the animal's brain.

WITH the echoes of the shot, cold grim realization of the thing he had done gripped the man's understanding. Here lay one of the DuFresnes, numerically largest of the three main-Cajan clans. A dozen or more of the DuFresne family were supposed to be clearing woodland for Bart Segrue this day.

The unconscious bully reeked of white whisky. Even when he attained a sort of consciousness there would be no reasoning with him. Still, he could not fail to remember enough, and to piece together still more from the body of the dog and the marks here in the pine needles and oak leaves.

His face becoming more thoughtful, quieter, Bart turned slowly away. No use to stay here now. It would just cause more trouble, perhaps a killing. Bart shook his head. The chunky gray

puppy whimpered, ran up against his legs.

"You poor, damned friendless ki-yoodle," said Bart. "S'pose you'll get the same dose if I leave you. Wonder what he'd say you were worth?" He jingled a fistful of silver in his pocket, tossed it out on the sand beside DuFresne. Then, stooping, he picked up the wriggling, delighted puppy, and made his way back to the Ford. "We never figured on keeping a dog down here. But I reckon you're elected—Smoke," he said, dumping fifteen pounds of ecstatic affection into the back seat and closing the door. He walked around and cranked the car.

From the floor carpet behind him, later as he sat under the wheel, came a low *wuff* and the sound of something being shaken to sawdust. The abducted puppy had discovered little Molly's biggest rag doll and was treating it justly according to his lights.

Little Molly was Bart's plump, laughing three-year-old daughter—a pocket edition of her fair-haired, blue-eyed mother. She had cherished that doll, dragging it all over the place by one limp arm or leg, and invariably leaving it out in the sand pile so Bart could rescue it the moment a sub-tropical cloud-burst came up out of the Gulf of Mexico. For this reason the man was careful to dispose of the remains before driving the car back into his home garage. Smoke—for thus the puppy had been christened—had done a complete job of demolition.

Before calling any one from the house, Bart went to one of the huge live oaks which shaded his back yard, and there gathered an armful of the trailing, maltese beards of Spanish moss. With these greasy-feeling locks of fiber parasite he made magic with Smoke.

When little Molly and her mother came into the yard, of their own accord, the woman with smudges of white flour upon her finely molded forearms, they were in time to witness a strange phenomenon. Across the back lawn, zigzagging crazily, came what appeared to be an animated bushel basket of moss. It rolled. It stopped and shook itself. Out of it came a succession of wondering, excited yips.

Little Molly had no fear of it. She ran, dodged after it, and gathered the whole of the mossy monstrosity into her arms. Involuntarily she sat down. Even at the age of three months Smoke was a strong little animal.

"A dog!" cried Mother Molly. "You really got one for us!" Her eyes were shining as she put one arm over her husband's broad shoulders. "Why, look! You can hardly tell where the moss ends and his hair begins!"

Bart smiled. "Let's call him Smoke. He won't be greasy like the moss."

SO it was that Smoke, a freakish sort of puppy, came to the Segrue household. From the beginning it was evident that he was destined to be large; yet except in one particular he was trim, never awkward. His tail grew and grew. It bulged out like a baseball bat of the Louisville slugger variety. A big, mournful-toned Negro who worked around the place voiced his opinion to Bart:

"Ev'yt'ing dat dawg's eat done gone to his tail! Yas-suh!"

So one day Smoke paid a call upon the local veterinary, and left with a thickness of white bandage on the stump of the Louisville slugger. After that, with pointed ears, a chesty carriage, and glossy, short-haired coat, he carried distinction and belligerence in every line. No one thought him the

nine kinds of mongrel he doubtless was. First as a joke, then from smiling habit, the Segrues assured every inquirer that Smoke was a full-blooded "pecan prowler." And perhaps he was.

Every day was a long romp with little Molly, whose first live pet he was. Yet when Bart drove in, tired and anxious of visage now from knowledge of how badly affairs were going in the woods, Smoke would abruptly stop anything he was doing. He would cease wiggling, and the boisterous scamper would fade out of him.

By the time Bart had started for the house, Smoke would be walking quietly, expectantly at his side, looking upward for a word or pat of recognition. If allowed, he would come indoors, lying down near the chair his master selected, eyes of golden brown watching every movement Bart made.

Molly the elder, one time seating herself across Bart's knees, saw the unfathomable golden eyes upon her, and noted that the hair back of Smoke's collar rose on end.

"I declare!" she said. "Look at that animal. I do believe he's jealous!"

Whatever the reason behind his strange action, Smoke ceased to act like a puppy whenever Bart was near. The man had no "way with dogs," as far as he knew. But here, because he recognized something unusual, he started to teach things to Smoke.

For reasons he did not even breathe to Molly, he was keeping out of the woods as much as possible at this time. He was awaiting a message which he knew would come to him from the Du-Fresne branch of the Cajans. So, he had leisure; and Smoke learned to walk at heel. He learned other, more playful tricks. Then one day the master took him out on leash, and tried to teach him to point coveys of quail.

The only result of this was complete failure. Smoke now would go forward or stay back, according to command, but he lacked a nose for birds. So Bart, oddly enough for a man who never had been around animals to any extent, began talking to Smoke when no one else was present, telling him to do other simple things, approving or scolding the performance. And he believed, after a bit, that the developing dog understood a large number of his words.

The first time Smoke got outside the brown-picketed gate into the streets of Citronelle, he discovered a new pastime, fighting. Two quarrelsome little fox terriers, snippy but punishing little brutes, attacked him without warning. In vain he tried to stiff-leg away from them, chin up, and an expression of annoyance on his muzzle. They were joined then by a nondescript black dog of about Smoke's size.

Without the slightest notion in his brain that dozens of generations of his canine ancestors had done the same, ignoring the small nuisance-dogs which exist everywhere, fighting to the death with their equals or superiors in size and strength, Smoke made a lumbering dash for the black dog.

Two snaps of teeth, a terrifyingly throaty growl which was attended by a joyous obbligato from the terriers, and the puppy was upon his enemy. The other dog, older but an arrant coward, yapped and bit back. They rolled over and over—until Molly Segrue came with a broom to separate them.

"**Y**OU'VE got to walk him around town, and teach him not to pick fights with other dogs," Molly told Bart that night. "Otherwise we can't keep him at all. He's big, and it would be too dangerous."

Bart acquiesced; for after all, Molly had the best of reasons. Up in the Board of Health building at Montgomery is a wall map of the State for public inspection. All over the map are red thumbtacks, each representing a dog with the rabies. Every one of these dogs may have roamed a wide territory before being killed, may have bitten scores of other animals. Every hot season there are plenty of scares in the neighborhood of Citronelle.

So Bart began taking Smoke with him, not only about the town, but on his visits to the woods. No word had come from the Cajans, and he found it absolutely necessary to take care of his property.

The Cajans were queer folk at best, and they had been funny about this affair. They had let it drag into weeks, months now, with never a word directly to Bart. Henri DuFresne, the man Bart had assaulted and from whom he took Smoke, had begun by swearing he would kill Bart to avenge himself. The other DuFresnes, most of whom had been moderately friendly in attitude toward the interloper, as they still regarded him, seemingly had been successful in diverting Henri's attention. Yet work on the acres to be cleared had come to a standstill. Cajans simply were not in evidence when Bart came in cautiously to see them.

It was their way. They preferred hiding out to arguing with him.

Finally he cornered Carter Jakes as he came in at nightfall to trade at Odom's store. Bart could talk persuasively; and before letting this member of a second clan depart for his kerosene and corn meal, wrung a reluctant promise that some of the men would get back at the work.

Bart turned away, elated at this half-victory at a time when he could almost

feel a new growth of jungle springing up where the clearing had already been finished. Bart did not see the scowling face of Seth Odom in the window, nor guess that immediately the Cajan entered the general store he was beset by an old man who forgot all of his peculiar storekeeper - autocrat - capitalist dignity when the thought of a damyank obtruded itself in his brain.

Within the store Seth Odom personally attended the wants of Carter Jakes, and then took him back into the musty little office, now belonging to Seth's eldest son, who ran the business. This day old Odom was the schemer of twenty years gone by, the shrewd and unscrupulous bargainer he had been when first really branching forth in his accumulation of wealth.

Carter Jakes, at best lukewarm toward Bart Segrue and his project, fell ready victim to blandishment. Reviewing the case of Henri DuFresne and the so-called dog theft, drinking some of the Odom private stock of pure corn whisky, the two men arranged a grim surprise for Bart Segrue, one that appealed immensely to the Cajan's primitive instincts.

Since it was likewise calculated to discredit Bart and his entire orchardization scheme, Seth Odom chuckled over it. Not in ten years had any one really dared to flout his will; this damyank would live to regret it!

BART suspected nothing out of the ordinary when next he drove out to the woods, Smoke erect and trying to be dignified on the seat beside him. Therefore, when he found his acres just as they had lain now for nearly three months, not a single tree felled nor clump of brush cleaned out by the Jakes clan, he was angry.

Ire changed quickly to the calmness

of inward apprehension, however, when all about him, rising from the very ground it seemed, Cajans appeared. They carried shotguns. They blocked his way back to the car. With a sinking heart he recognized DuFresnes as well as members of the Jakes and Bombazin clans. This was the long-delayed judgment he had asked for and expected, then. From the looks of things, he was in for it.

The Cajans came slowly toward him, in silence. With them Bart Segrue saw old Seth Odom, and a grim smile played on his lips. This settled matters. He knew he could expect no mercy from Seth. Quietly he dropped his hand to the collar of Smoke. The big puppy was restless, about to growl. He sensed the enmity in the air.

Frank DuFresne, serious and not unintelligent spokesman for his clan, the man with whom Bart had made most of his initial arrangements for the woods clearing, came a little ahead of the rest, direct to Bart.

"We-all wanted to see you hyah," he said, sing-songing his words, but making them clear to all.

"Yes? Well, I'm here."

Stripping away the circumlocutions, the mingled Choctaw and French from the talk that followed, it developed that the Cajans had been considering matters; had come to the conclusion that Henri DuFresne had been wronged, and deserved satisfaction. He was here to secure it personally.

Bart looked about slowly. His eyes seemed queerly out of focus, but this was apparent to the circle of men only in a narrowing, a harsher setting of his other features. Yes, there was Henri DuFresne, back with the rest of his clan. Stripped to the waist he showed up as a big man indeed, somewhat corroded and softened by dissipation, no

doubt, but still with a frame and thews capable of giving a tussle to a piney woods bull.

"You want me to fight him. That's it, eh?" he said slowly, nodding.

"Henri aims to beat you half to death," Frank DuFresne admitted. His face was troubled, though pride of family would cause him to side with his brother.

Bart's decision was immediate. "All right, bring him on!" he cried, and tore off his shirt, pistol belt and undershirt. "Take care of Smoke, will you?" He thrust the dog collar into the hand of Frank DuFresne.

A rude sort of ring formed, and into it, hairy arms dangling, burst Henri DuFresne. A grin of anticipation and cruelty twisted his heavy features. Without preliminary he lunged straight for Bart Segreue.

This was woods fighting, with no rules whatsoever. Bart surmised that some of the Cajans intended to see that he was not actually killed; but up to that point DuFresne would be allowed satisfaction for his presumed wrong.

Outweighed thirty pounds, topped in height by half a foot, Bart saw very little chance for himself. He would be thoroughly beaten; and after that, Seth Odom making the most of it, there would be none of the Cajans willing to take his orders or his money. Failure. Failure for himself, Molly and the kid, unless...

WITHOUT much difficulty he dodged the sudden upswing of those hairy arms, and smacked in a left-handed jolt to the stomach. Dodge him. Keep on dodging, and box as he had never boxed before! Dodge, though. One clutching, crushing clinch and it would be curtains.

Time and again he repeated the

same tactics, backing, side-stepping, dodging forward and under the arms that sought to clutch and rend him. Each time he managed to send in some sort of a counter blow, but most of them were ineffectual.

Bart realized his own shortcomings as a boxer. In a stand-up exchange of punches with a man his own size he could do fairly well, in a gym ring. But hitting an opponent always on the move, and keeping away from any sort of clinch at the same time, were matters very different. Besides, the footing was soft and unreliable.

Henri DuFresne was snarling now, voicing epithets of hate. He had not been harmed in the least, and this backing and dodging on the part of his opponent seemed to him an indication of cowardice. It infuriated him.

Bart was in trouble and knew it. He was in excellent condition; but it is one thing to be sound and hard as nails, and entirely another thing to be in condition to fist-fight for life.

Let's see. He'd knocked out this big tramp once before by an uppercut to the jaw. Probably that would work again, if only he could connect squarely. Trouble was, DuFresne had so much excess of reach.

Still, feeling that this was his only hope—the Cajan, though maddened to the point of explosion, probably could keep up this pursuit for hours, if necessary—Bart maneuvered for that single punch. He backed, backed and dodged again, until rough hands of the Cajans forming the ring made him seek the center again.

Another rush from DuFresne. This time, instead of backing he ducked low, almost to the ground, then instantly shot upward like a jack-in-the-box, his right fist swinging in a deadly arc that was aimed at the chin of the Cajan.

It did not connect squarely. His knuckles tore a patch of brown skin from Henri's right cheekbone, and blood flowed. An audible suspiration of breath came from the crowd.

Then suddenly it happened. Wriggling, tearing loose, Bart managed to get away from the clutching hands; Henri had been dazed momentarily. But from the close-packed circle behind Bart as he backed away swiftly, a shotgun barrel in the hands of Seth Odom was thrust forward. It went between the fighter's legs, was twisted skillfully. Bart went down.

That was the end. Henri was upon him before he could arise, and the clutching hands got their prey. Turning, butting, fighting like a wild cat, Bart Segroe nevertheless had no chance. He was imprisoned, crushed by a man mad with the lust to kill.

DuFresne's strength was ample. A bone snapped in Bart's left arm. After that he knew little. He was pounded. He was picked up, hurled back to the ground, and jumped upon. All went mercifully black before his eyes.

A LONG time later, nauseated by pain that seemed to have taken possession of every fiber of his body, Bart was brought around to consciousness by something warm and eager splashed again and again against his marred and swollen face. Whining a little, Smoke was standing over him, doing his puppy best to resuscitate his master, about whom was this hideous smell of blood and sickness.

"Oh, don't!" groaned Bart, and tried to turn over. His broken arm got in the way, however.

Smoke gave a yelp of joy at hearing the words, but then stood away, gravely waiting for affairs to be resumed upon their old basis. What he knew

or guessed of Bart's condition no one ever can be certain.

Gritting his teeth, Bart finally rose to his knees. Then, a long time afterward, he staggered erect. Bloodstained, his eyes nearly closed, the useless left arm thrust into the waistband of his trousers, he swayed there a moment while the reeling world came again to horizontal. Then, trailing his pistol belt and the two shirts he could not put on, he began the painful journey to the place where he had left the Ford.

This was the last notch of Odom's malice. Where the ancient car had been now remained only a smoking ruin of charred fiber and scorched metal.

Bart stared at it a few moments, speechless. Then his grotesque features twisted in a grin of pain.

"G'by, Liz," he muttered. "Guess you an' I feel about the same... C'mon, Smoke."

Head down, staggering in the ruts he scarcely could see, Bart started on the long road to Citronelle.

There need be no chronicle of that journey. It is miles long, at best, for a well man. For Bart it was part daze, part hideous nightmare. Hours passed, and still he plugged doggedly onward. Was that the feed store he passed? If so, he must be getting near... somewhere near, anyway...

While the gray dog stalked solemnly at his heels, now and then looking up wonderingly at the master who seemed so far from his usual self, another slice of life's cruelty was being prepared for serving just ahead of them.

AT the white house on the hill a children's lawn party had reached the ice cream and cake stage. Twenty-six little girls in white dresses, a few of the more amenable town boys

from four to ten years of age, and a bevy of proud mothers were gathered to celebrate Cecilia Odom's seventh birthday. Cecilia was the eldest granddaughter of Seth Odom. Her sister was there, and also her four cousins. They had been playing happily enough with little Molly Segrue, whose laughter made her popular everywhere.

Behind the big white house and the rambling lean-tos of the servants' quarters, stretched a galvanized wire, rather slack. Attached to this was a ring, a chain, and a worn leather dog collar. Inside the collar was a nondescript black dog, the one Smoke had engaged in combat months before in his first puppy attempt. The black dog had been chained up to keep him out of the way of the merry-makers.

He had howled mournfully, but of course no one paid any attention; Shep was not used to being tied up. A little after that, however, his actions became peculiar. He would run, eyes staring wide, and butt straight into the picket fence. He staggered unsurely. He snapped at a wooden clothes pole, at a rosebush that happened to be near. Flecks of white foam gathered in the corners of his mouth. His lips retracted.

Backing, shaking his head, fighting the collar, the black dog struggled against the wire, the chain, everything in the world. The dread frenzy was upon him.

Then the collar slipped over his ears. One slaving howl and he leaped the fence, dashing madly out through the truck garden, circling, coming back to the road, biting at everything that he saw.

The stumbling, half-blind man in the road was conscious of a tearing, snapping cyclone that passed him. Bart heard Smoke growl savagely with in-

stinctive aversion to this horrid, unnatural thing. But Shep did not see either of them. He fought with the wires of a fence, managed to scratch through.

Just outside, looking up the hill, his mouth half agape, Bart saw the assemblage of children seated on the green grass, the mothers moving about, distributing refreshments.

Then came the staggering, slaving beast—the women's terrified screams—and the mad dog was among them almost before a single child knew what was happening, or could be snatched away to safety.

The screams brought Bart partially to himself. He stared, and then a terrible exclamation burst from his lips. Shep was mad. Molly and little Molly were there! He ran for the fence, but he knew that he would be very, very late.

Then came a sobbing inspiration. With his good arm he grabbed up Smoke, hurled him over the fence.

"Get him, boy! *Sic him!*" he screamed, waving his arm up the hill. Then, yanking out the automatic pistol from its holster, Bart himself tumbled over the fence somehow, and climbed the hill at a reeling run.

Smoke knew. A pearl-gray cyclone, he raced for his old enemy, the black dog. He reached him at the dead run, struck with his shoulder and snapped. The two rolled over in a raucous-sounding flurry of madness and determination.

Smoke got a hold, but it was only an ear. He chewed this, cussed in dog language, shifted, got bitten in a broad gash across one shoulder, rolled over and over. It was impossible for any one to tell which dog was which. And there were no spectators, except an old man who came to the porch, then ran back to secure his shotgun. The women

and the children all were fleeing now. The women were still screaming—one of the boys had been bitten, possibly one of the girls also.

Bart came. Flinging himself upon the two struggling dogs, he managed to seize Smoke by the collar. Then, poking blindly, he thrust the muzzle of the automatic straight between the slaving jaws of Shep and pulled the trigger once—twice—three times. Then he jerked away, pulling Smoke with him. He staggered erect, but only for a moment.

"Molly!" he croaked. "Is Molly safe?"

And then his knees gave way. Seth Odom, running out with his useless shotgun, found Bart Segrue again unconscious upon the ground, one limp hand holding the pistol while the other held tightly to the collar of the puppy.

OTHER hands cared for him then. The gashes, the truly alarming array of contusions, the broken arm—all were treated tenderly and well. Molly was with him every moment now. Little Molly had not been touched. The Granger girl had been knocked over, but nowhere had the dog's teeth broken her skin. Little Billy Lewis had been bitten twice.

They iced the carcass of Shep and sent him up to the Board of Health at Montgomery the same evening. Next afternoon a telegram arrived from the medical authorities. Shep had been afflicted with rabies. That meant that Billy Lewis and Bart Segrue would have to go up for the Pasteur injections. Bart really did not know whether or not he had been bitten; but it was safer to assume that he had, in view of the condition of his body.

Some of the town residents, viewing askance the gray dog who had helped

divert the peril from their children, spoke in whispers of shooting Smoke. Bart was enough himself so he would hear nothing of such an idea.

"Chain him in here, to my bed. He can't hurt *me*, anyway," he said emphatically. "To-morrow night he and I and Billy go to Montgomery. We'll all have the treatment, if it takes every cent I have in the world!" His right hand reached down to touch the shoulder of the quiet gray dog.

So it was that they went north to the State capital, accompanied by Molly and Mrs. Lewis. There Bart argued and cajoled—the Pasteur treatment for dogs was not yet officially recognized—and finally won his point. Smoke, with the rest of them, received his twenty-one daily hypodermics. And he lived through them as his blood cleansed, which was a tribute to his stamina. The pecan prowler strain was going to be hard to destroy.

While the days of dread passed slowly on, to be followed at least by joyous assurance that all would be well, certain grim conferences were held in the Odom household. Old Seth attended them, tight-lipped, pale and silent. His two sons, rough men in their way, but who loved their families, had no particular sympathy with the treatment accorded Bart Segrue up there in the depths of the woods. They talked plainly and to the point.

And they were not alone. The sinister story of the tripping that assured that beating had leaked out. Men Seth Odom had known all his life passed him on the street without seeing him. They were on the side of the danyank! Seth had to swallow it. But he was a tough old buzzard, and his digestion was good.

The day came when the entire town of Citronelle was assembled on Main

Street beside the M. and O. depot. The stuffy engine puffed in and exhaled. A little party descended, to be met by three rousing cheers, a shrill note of which was furnished by children's voices.

There was a speech by Mayor Crittenden, and then Smoke had to submit while his muzzle was removed and a wide, flashing, gilt-spiked collar was fastened around his neck. It had been purchased by the children of the grammar school, and was engraved:

SMOKE SEGRUE, DOG HERO

The ceremonies were over at last, and then a stiff-backed, white-mustached figure appeared. It had taken a lot to bring Seth Odom; but once he started he made a rather handsome job of it.

"I wish to tell you, suh," he said straight out to Bart Segrue, "that we are proud of yo' and yo' dawg. Pu'haps all has not been done right by yo', but from now on it will be! Will yo' step

this way—and Mrs. Lewis—and little Billy—and Smoke, too?" He forgot Molly Segrue and little Molly, but they came along, the woman's face a mixture of pride and distrust.

At the platform edge stood one of the new model Fords, its engine running.

"Try this one, suh. I trust yo' will like it as well as the old one. And I mought add," concluded Seth Odom, sweeping off his hat in what was probably his first bow in ten years, "that the road out into the woods and the lake has been fixed some. Maybe yo'll be driving out soon, suh, to see what our Cajans have been doing on yo' land?"

Bart preserved his gravity until he had driven away from the station amid the renewed cheers of the children. Then he winked down at Smoke, stiff and preternaturally solemn at his side.

"Our Cajans!" he repeated confidentially, then. "You've got to remember that, Smoke, old boy!"

THE END.



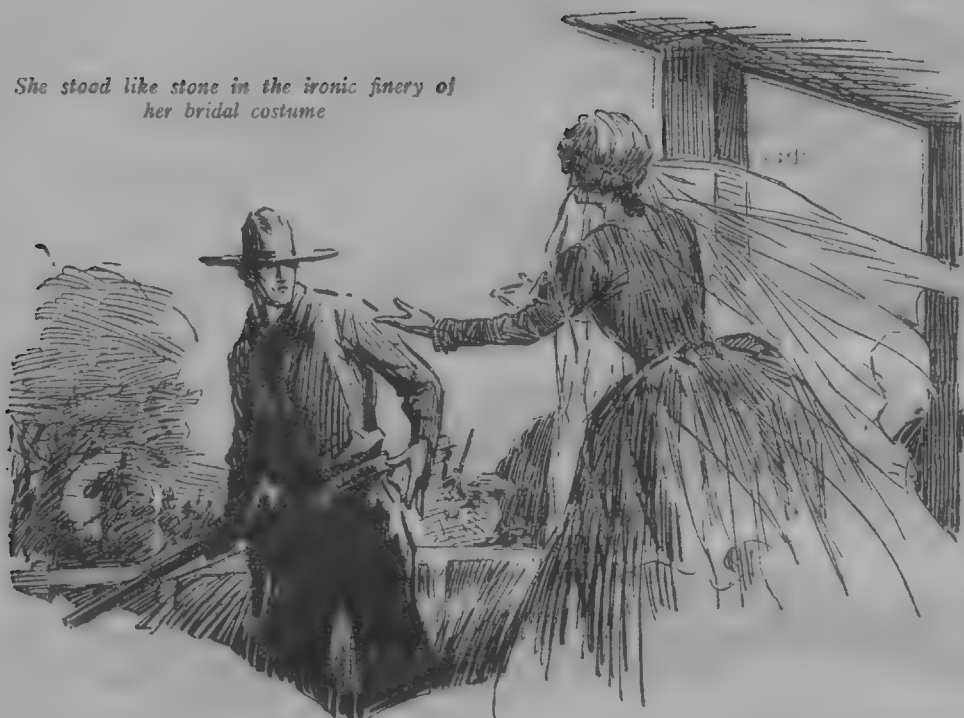
A Parade of Living Dead

OF nature's multitude of oddities, there is none more strange and awe-inspiring than the history of the lemmings. These little creatures, found in Scandinavia and Northern Asia, resemble an ordinary field mouse and live in the same manner, on a diet of roots and grass. When their food becomes scarce, however, owing to climatic conditions, the colonies of mice begin what may safely be called the strangest parade in the world. Heading toward a region that promises more food, the colony starts *en masse*. Every lemming colony that is met joins the van, and thereafter they never stop, until death ends their journey.

The lemming army feeds upon all vegetation as it travels forward, leaving behind a swath of ruined countryside, and ruts a foot deep worn by their tiny feet. At its height the mass numbers hundreds of thousands, or even millions. Overhead and on its flanks are birds and animals, preying and feeding upon it. The insane lemmings drive onward, until some mighty lake or, more often, the sea ends the strange pilgrimage in the way of all flesh.

Robert F. Bailey.

*She stood like stone in the ironic finery of
her bridal costume*



The Crimson Trail

*The mob had laid a trail of blood and fire across their Western county
—yet nobody could save them from the outlaws west of the
river except the men whom the mob had been hunting*

By J. E. GRINSTEAD

Author of "War Above the Timberline," "In the Reign of King Ben," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

PELHAM HENSLEY, twenty-one-year-old Kentuckian, faces life's grimness when, on their way West, his father and another Kentuckian, Framwell, are killed by horse-thieves. Pell leaves the orphaned Josie Framwell with the gruff Grand River ferryman, Uncle Dave Short, and Aunt Em, while he rides into the outlaw country west of the Grand. He recovers his thoroughbred, Star, and

Josie's Kentucky Belle from Verne Cole's ranch.

Cole fools the sheriff, Steve Ware, into trying to arrest Pell for killing his men and stealing the horses from him. The upshot is that Dave Short drives Sheriff Ware from his ferry cabin. Ensuing events convince the incompetent but stubborn sheriff that Short, Hensley, and even Captain Jim Gaines, leader of the old-timers and a

This story began in the Argosy for August 23.

former sheriff, are heading the rustlers.

Ware, egged on by the crafty Cole, rouses a mob to hunt the three and their women, while Cole and his band of thieves ride by night to loot Emmet County and drive the bewildered citizens to desperation.

Jim Gaines, Dave Short, and Pell Hensley leave Aunt Em and Josie in camp in a river thicket. They capture Cole's lieutenant, Clay, and leave him in custody of a trapper, Doc Flatt; then the three ride west of the Grand and stampede the stolen horses back into Emmet County.

On their return they learn that the mob has got out of Ware's control and is on its way to destroy Gaines's home. They arrive just in time to protect his family, and are reinforced by District Judge Charles Stowe and some friends. The mob is beaten off and disperses; but Stowe's hope of peace for Emmet County and for his friends is blackened by Pell Hensley's determination to hunt up Sheriff Ware and kill him.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RAID OF REVENGE.

JUDGE STOWE'S face was drawn with grief over the seemingly inevitable tragedy ahead. "Hear me another moment, Pell," he pleaded. "You love Uncle Dave Short and his good wife. You must love them, after what they have been to you and Josie. Do you want to see that good old woman weeping alone over the ashes of a cheerless hearth because Dave Short has been hanged, or is spending his last days in a felon's cell, separated from the woman he has loved? Do you want—"

"Stop, judge, please stop," faltered

Pell. "I have thought of all of that. That, even beyond his shooting at Josie, is why I am going to kill Ware."

"What! Sacrifice your whole life, your love, everything, for—"

"For the only man I ever saw, except my father, that I would die for. If it weren't for Uncle Dave and Aunt Em, Josie and I would not be here alive. I heard Uncle Dave swear a terrible oath that he would kill Ware for burning his house. A man like Uncle Dave means what he says. I am going to kill Steve Ware before Uncle Dave can do it."

"Thank God for men like that!" said Judge Stowe fervently. "Listen, Pell: do you know why Old Dave Short means to kill Steve Ware? He just told me it was to keep you from killing him and ruining your life. Let me call Dave out here. Let me see you and him pledge each other that neither of you will hunt Ware up—that you will not kill him at all, unless he attacks you and you are forced to kill him. Do that, and it will be the greatest achievement of my life. If Dave will give his word, will you give yours?"

"Yes," answered Pell slowly. "I'd like to live and be happy, if Uncle Dave can."

Josie noticed the very song in Stowe's voice as he called Dave Short. She saw Uncle Dave join them in the barnyard. She saw them stand talking a few moments, and then she saw Uncle Dave and Pell clasp hands, while Stowe stood with a friendly hand on the shoulder of each. A moment later they broke apart, and the three of them came into the house together.

"Captain Gaines," said Stowe happily, "we are going to get this thing settled right away. I can see my way out of it now. There is only one thing

lacking. Your friends will believe every word you three say, just as I do, but we want everybody to believe it. If we had only one witness from the west side! One man who knew that you three brought Emmet County's horses back to their rightful—"

Stowe stopped, as he saw a glance pass between Gaines and Pell. Then Gaines said:

"He is your prisoner, Pell. Shall we bring him here and let him tell what he knows about those horses being brought back to this side, if he will tell?"

"Yes, if it will help," said Pell.

"Where is that prisoner?" asked Stowe when he understood.

"Over on Deer Creek."

"Get him here as quick as you can. That is all we lack. Things are beginning to work now."

Stowe rubbed his hands in glee. As soon as Pell and Uncle Dave left for Doc Platt's cabin, to get the prisoner, the judge began giving orders to the men who had ridden with him to the relief of the Gaines house.

"Robertson, you and Cullom ride for town. You have heard all the story. Tell every man you see as much of it as you can. If there are any who question it, tell them we have a witness from the west side. Get back here before noon, and bring the county clerk with you. I want him to take a deposition." Then he followed Robertson to the door, and said in a low tone: "Tell the clerk to bring a marriage license blank with him, too. We may need it."

Long before noon Robertson returned with the clerk. He reported that the people had accepted the returned horses as proof of the story told by Gaines. Tom Wicker and other men known to have been in the mob

the night before had slunk out of town, glad to escape with their lives; and a strong wave of public sentiment was setting toward Gaines and his friends.

"What about Sheriff Ware?" demanded Stowe.

"The sheriff is not talking. He just sits in his office with a grim look on his face and says nothing."

As they suspected, Ware was still convinced of the guilt of Short and Gaines and Hensley, but didn't dare to face the storm of indignation over what had happened at the Gaines ranch the night before.

PELL and Uncle Dave returned at noon with Clay. Using the big living room for a court room, Judge Stowe set about getting the testimony he wanted, in the form of a deposition.

Clay saw that his neck was in jeopardy, and he talked freely. He said his name was Clay Gorman; that he had been with Cole a year. Stowe questioned him closely, particularly about the raid made by Gaines and Pell, in which Clay had been captured. When the deposition was finished, Stowe said:

"You will be held prisoner until we can look further into your case and decide what to do with you."

Clay was locked in the stable, and the pony court went into executive session.

"Mr. Clerk," said the court, "I want you to make a transcript of that testimony. Make a summary of that part in regard to Captain Gaines and Pell Hensley going across the river and getting those horses; have it printed on handbills at once and circulated all over Emmet County."

"Then, if the court please, I'd better ride."

"Not just yet. There is another important matter that I want you to attend to before you leave." The judge was beaming now. He called Pell, Captain Gaines and Old Dave Short into another room.

"Pell," he went on, laying a friendly hand on Pell's shoulder, "I am about to break into your affairs again, and I hope you'll take it in the same spirit that you did before. We all know the feeling that exists between you and Josie, but you are not married, and—"

Pell stiffened, his eyes went hard, and his face darkened.

"Steady, my friend," said Stowe. "There is no man living who would be farther from making an insinuation about a woman than I. The point is, that God makes true marriages, but fools can't understand them. The clerk is here and can issue the license. I'm here and can perform the ceremony."

"But, judge," stammered Pell, his anger all gone, "I understand what you mean now, and it's all right; but I have no home to take a wife to, and no job. I—I haven't got a right to—"

"A woman that wouldn't marry a man that she loved, if he had only enough money to pay for the license and give the preacher a mite, is not worth having. Josie is not that kind of a woman. She'll help you make the fight. Go ask her, man, if you haven't already done it, so the clerk can fill out the license and go. He is in a hurry to get to town."

Pell stumbled out the door. He was back in a few minutes, blushing furiously.

It was not the disposition of Judge Charles Stowe to meddle in the private affairs of anybody, but he had a method in what he was trying to do just then. He knew human frailty only too well. If he could see Pell safely mar-

ried to Josie, it would be another and stronger bond to keep him from killing Steve Ware when they met.

"Where is the bride?" he asked gayly, leading the way back to the big room where he had just held court. "Bring her in, Pell. I've got to get back to town, too."

"Oh, Charlie," said Mrs. Gaines, "she can't be married in that rig. Mrs. Short and I are going to dress her up in my wedding dress, which I have been saving for all the years for just such a happy occasion as this."

"Fine! We can wait for a thing like that."

WHILE Mrs. Gaines and Aunt Em were fussing about in a back room, trying to press the folds out of the beautiful dress and straighten the ribbons and laces, Pell was restlessly walking the gravel path in front of the house. Gaines, Dave Short and the judge had walked out on the front porch. The snow was all gone, the sun was shining brightly, and it was a typical early spring afternoon.

"Glorious day, captain," said Stowe. "The storm clouds are gone. Within twenty-four hours you and Dave and Pell will be heroes in this county. All the people need is to know—"

"There is no telling what another twenty-four hours may bring," said Gaines gravely. "Steve Ware and his arrogance, his domineering disposition, have caused all this. He is still sheriff. His heart is still filled with hate for us three, and no man can tell what crazy thing he will do, trying to justify himself."

"I'm going to ride for town as soon as the wedding is over," said Stowe, "and have a talk with Ware. When I

get through my conversation with him, I think—"

Judge Stowe never finished that sentence. Hoofs were pounding the trail. Every man's hand went to his gun, just to make sure that it was there. Then Doc Flatt's old pony skidded to a stop at the front gate.

"Cap'n, sir," called Doc, "I'd like to speak to you gentlemen, please, sir."

"What is it, Doc?" asked Gaines, as they all four reached the gate together.

"Why, you recollect Ike Skyles, over on the south fork of Deer Creek, that stabbed a fellow last fall?"

"Yes," said Stowe in an annoyed tone, "I remember the case. If Ike will stay out of the county, I'll be well enough pleased."

"He's been staying out, mostly. He went acrost to the west side, and has been scouting around among the nesters over there. He's got him a skiff hid in the willows on yan side the river, and he comes acrost nights sometimes, to visit with me. We swaps news, plays checkers and the like, and then—"

"Well, what of it?" snapped Stowe. "We don't hold that against you. We don't want Ike very badly."

"I know, but what I was going to say, while Ike is a pretty sorry specimen of a man, still he was borned and growed up in old Emmet County, and— Along to'ds noon to-day he paddles acrost to my cabin, right in broad open daylight. I knowed by that they was something on his mind. He tells me that after Cap'n Gaines and Dave and this Pell fellow takes the second helping of horses and runs 'em back to this side, Verne Cole just slips his hackimo' and goes braunk. He swears Cole aims to ree-tally-ate. I don't know what that word means,

but it must be something bad. Ike, he says they's around two hundred rustlers over there, and they aim to come acrost—"

"When?" snapped Stowe.

"To-night. One gang crosses above Deer Creek and takes Deer Creek Valley. One crosses below the ferry and takes the lower end. Cole and the main gang crosses at the ferry, and particular aims to clean the Gaines ranch."

"They'll ruin us, captain!" cried Stowe. "We've got to get men. Get to your horses."

AT Stowe's call, his men came pouring from the house. Pell ran into the house and caught up his carbine. As he did so, Josie came into the room, a vision of loveliness in her bridal gown. Pell looked at her and his heart bounded.

"Will I do, Pell?" she asked.

"You're the prettiest thing on earth, but—I can't marry you now."

"You can't—why—Pell?"

"There's no one to marry us, honey. The judge is gone, and I've got to go. That gang from the west side is coming to raid the county to-night. We've got to raise men to fight them."

Tears sprang to Josie's eyes, but she fought them back bravely.

"Kiss me and go, Pell. If you don't come back, I'll be as much a widow as if a thousand judges had married us. God gave me to you."

"Don't lose heart. We'll whip them," he said as he kissed her and then strode out of the house. At the door he looked back, and surprised a look of anguish on her face that he hoped he would never see again. She was standing like stone, all in her bridal finery, with her hands still held out to him.

Stowe was giving orders.

"Two of you ride for the Deer Creek Valley. Tell the men over there to get out and stop that bunch up the river; they'll be only a small force. The main attack will cross at the ferry. Ride now. Warn every house you pass, and tell the men out this way to rally under Captain Gaines, here.

"Robertson, you take three men with you. Spread out and ride for the southwest corner of the county. Raise the people down there, then stay with 'em and fight with 'em. Don't spare your horses.

"Dave, Pell—let's start for Emmetsville!"

Out through the barnyard gate they went and clattered on toward the Ferry Road, unmindful of a girl in a bridal gown who stood at a window and watched until they disappeared. When they were out of sight, Josie went back to her room, removed the filmy garment, and replaced it with her riding breeches and sweater. Then she went out and saddled Kentucky Belle.

"Josie, you can't ride anywhere at a time like this," said Captain Gaines.

"I—I'd rather have her saddled, anyway."

Gaines saddled his horse and took it to the front of the yard. The other four men were going to stay at the ranch and guard the house.

"We can only wait," said Gaines. "If no others come, we've got to stay and protect the women. I know that type of desperado Cole has enlisted; they are inhuman brutes who will stop at nothing."

The men who went to Deer Creek had started the warning, and it had spread like fire in a gale. Pell and his companions had done the same thing. Long before sunset men could be seen galloping across the prairie, all converging on the Gaines ranch.

As they reached the ranch, the captain greeted each one by name. They were a different type of men from those he had fought the night before. Grim, hard-faced old fellows, who gripped Jim Gaines's hand in silence. By sunset there were fifty of them.

"Well, men," said Gaines, "we'll have to ride pretty soon if we want to stop that gang before they do mischief. You ought to select your leader and get ready."

"Leader?" said their spokesman bluntly. "There never was but one man in the county that could lead anything worth a damn, and that's Jim Gaines. We are here for you to lead us."

"Thanks, boys," said Gaines huskily as a chorus of sanctioning voices rose. "I'll do my best. There won't be much orders. All we have to do is stop *Verne Cole*. We'll wait a little longer and see if more will come . . . Yes, they are still coming."

INTO the main street of Emmetsville, just before sunset, thundered three mighty horsemen. They had raised a countryside, even as Paul Revere once did, and now they were going to rouse the county town as it had never been roused before—as only Charlie Stowe, who was the first white child born in Emmet County, could rouse it.

They drew rein at the courthouse square. Men who had heard the story of the night before were already running toward them. Charlie Stowe could get a crowd at any crossroads in the county, but he had never availed himself of his power with the people. He stood in his stirrups now, his long hair blowing about his face, and his mighty voice rolled through the streets like waters in a rocky gorge:

"Fellow citizens—men of Emmet County: Last night some of you were ready to hang your best friends and burn their houses. To-night you will have an opportunity to hang your enemies. The men who have been raiding your homes are massed on the other side of Grand River, under the leadership of Verne Cole. You have thought this man was a ranchman. He is king thief and a soulless murderer, and he is coming with his band this very night to lay waste the homes of Emmet County citizens.

"Send men north and south on the highway. Send them east into the countryside. Tell all men to rally now, for the protection of their homes. If we do not stop them at the river, they may even burn and pillage this town. I have no flowers of speech for you. I shall not tell you how brave you are. Show me, by arming and mounting."

Emmet County was largely cattle country. Many ranchmen, with their families, lived in town. In an incredibly short time armed riders were clattering into the square about the courthouse.

Steve Ware stood in the portico of the courthouse. There were the two men he wanted to kill—Dave Short and the newcomer, Pell Hensley, sitting by the side of Charlie Stowe, a place Steve had coveted all his life.

Stowe saw him, and called:

"Come out here, Steve Ware. This is not just a sheriff's job; but it is a time for all men to bury their personal feelings, to bury themselves in a common cause. Get your horse and come on."

The square was filling with mounted men. Charlie Stowe was no longer the sleepy, lazy jurist. He was a great leader, compelling men to do his bidding.

"Form in fifties, out there in the street, and I'll appoint leaders for you." Fifty men wheeled into the street. "I'll give you the bravest man I ever saw to lead the first company. Follow him, and he'll lead you through hell itself to victory! Take your men, Pell, and join Jim Gaines on the Ferry Road."

At the name "Jim Gaines" a thunder of applause went up. Pell had simply ridden to the head of the men and shouted, "Let's go, fellows," and they were gone.

Another company wheeled into the street.

"You get a leader that fought for Emmet County before some of you were born, battling shoulder to shoulder with the noble old Jim Gaines—Dave Short!"

Again the air was filled with cheering.

To the next company he roared:

"You get the man you elected sheriff. He'll take you where there's fighting to be done, and will do his share of it."

Stung to the quick, Ware took his company. There was no cheering.

As they moved away, Stowe said to the little more than half a company: "I'll take the remnant, if you boys will have me."

A cheer greeted him, and he called to a group of old men on the corner, that if any more men came in they should tell them to take the Ferry Road and come on.

"Y. gonnies, gentlemen," said a toothless old fellow in the swiftly emptying town, "Charlie Stowe could be President if he weren't too lazy. He can make men do anything he wants 'em to do when he gets a little riled."

"When Charlie says a thing he means it, and everybody knows it's true," replied another. "I wonder who

is that young fellow he called the bravest man he ever knew?"

"Why, that's Pell Hensley, the chap that Steve Ware tried to make out was stealing hosses with Jim Gaines and Dave Short. He, he, he! That's a joke on Steve."

CHAPTER XIV.

BATTLE OF THE FERRY ROAD.

AS he galloped along at the head of his remnant of a company, Charlie Stowe was again the scientist, studying his colony of ants. He was thinking of how pitiful had been the misdirected efforts of the mob of the day before, and how nobly the citizenry were responding now to a just call to duty.

The judge was not deluding himself that he had raised an army. He even smiled at the thought. If there were really two hundred outlaws massed on the west side, which he doubted, and they should come across in a body with a determined leader, he had small hope that these few hundred recruits, unaccustomed to warfare, could even check them. All that was on the knees of the gods. A few men would have to bear the brunt of the fighting, but the best of Emmet County's citizenship would be in the field and would see it done, standing on the side of law and order.

The fact was that Charlie Stowe was one of those makers of kings, fit to be a king himself, and too modest or too indolent to grasp a crown. When he had roused himself and gone to the Gaines ranch the night before, it had been out of his sheer love and respect for old Jim Gaines.

But after he had seen Pell Hensley walk through the mob to that stable and rescue the suffocating prisoners, he had

decided to make a king. How far he would go before indolence overcame him was problematical. Just now he was thinking of two things: restoring the venerable Jim Gaines to his rightful position with the people, and making them admire Pell Hensley as he did.

At the head of the galloping string of riders was Pell on his great bay thoroughbred, Star. He was thinking of no such things. He was going into this fight because Gaines, Short and his new-found friend Judge Stowe were going into it. What he wanted more than anything else, in fact all he asked of the world, was the woman he loved, peace, and a job of honest labor at which he could earn her a living.

Pell knew nothing about border warfare. He knew he wasn't fit to be a leader of these men whom he had never seen before. He was galloping on at their head only because Stowe had told him to do it. He was leading them to Captain Jim Gaines, which, though he didn't know it, was all that Stowe expected of him.

Pell was not even thinking of Steve Ware. He knew Dave Short led the second group, but he didn't know that Ware was leading the third, nor did he suspect that Stowe had purposely put Old Dave between his band and the sheriff's.

It was a four-mile gallop from town to where the trail turned off to the Gaines ranch house. As he drew near it, riding a length in the lead of his men, Pell looked across the prairie at the twinkling lights in the old stone house, and wondered if Josie was at the window, listening to the rumbling hoofs, and whether he would ever see her again.

Two men sat their horses by the side of the road. Pell swerved out to them.

"Straight ahead on the Ferry Road," one of the men said. "Captain Gaines left orders for all the men to join him there."

A few mighty leaps of Star, and Pell was again at his place in the van. The column had never halted. Under the dim starlight, the horsemen swept on down the slope.

JIM GAINES sat grimly on his horse, just at the edge of the river timber. He had only seventy-five men with him. What could he do with this little band, among whom there were not more than a dozen real fighting men, against the horde of outlaws who were coming to despoil the country, to raid his ranch, and destroy the home he had loved so long? He was oppressed by the gloomy outlook.

Suddenly he sat erect in his saddle. Above the low murmur of moving men and horses about him came the deep rumble of many hoofs. A minute later he heard them halt, and a man was riding through the open formation of Gaines's band.

"Right over there by that big tree," some one told the newcomer, and then Pell drew up near him.

"How many men have you?" asked Gaines.

"I have the first company of fifty, sir. There are two or three others."

"Fine! Get the leaders here. Tell the men to remember the number of their company, so they can keep together."

Pell dashed away, riding back the trail from company to company. He stood within ten feet of the leader of the third company, and delivered the order, not knowing in the darkness that he was addressing Steve Ware.

Pell and Charlie Stowe rode back together to where Gaines waited.

"Well, gentlemen," said Gaines, "the leaders are all here. How many men have we?"

"We brought nearly two hundred," said Stowe.

"And I have seventy-five. Now, who directs this fight—if we have one?"

"You do," they answered, in unison save for Ware, who sat his horse in silence.

"All right, men. I'll do what I can. Steve, take your company and picket the road toward the ferry. Halt your company half a mile from the river, but scout the road all the way to the ford."

Without a word, Ware rode back to his men, and a minute later his company passed on into the timber. Ware honestly did not believe there was danger from the other side. He was still convinced that he had broken the strength of the rustlers, when he killed four men at Short's cabin and burned the place.

He believed Short and Hensley were foxes, running with the hounds to hide their own trail. To him this was a lot of bombastic horse-play, and he was sticking along to have the laugh on Charlie Stowe when it was over. There would be another day, and he would yet pin the guilt on Gaines, Short, and Hensley. The people would come to their senses after this crazy scare at some unfounded story. They had been easy to scare; after the raid of a few days ago.

Thinking these things, Steve Ware carelessly picketed the ferry road from within half a mile of the river to the ford. At the first picket, with half a dozen men, he sat in silence on his horse, waiting patiently for his time to laugh.

Captain James Monroe Gaines had

not got his title from being captain of the Vigilantes, as many supposed. He had won it in a real war, and at real fighting; his name was on file in the War Office at Washington.

The captain was no longer despondent. He had men, and they had shown their confidence in him. He snapped orders in a tone that was meant to be obeyed, as he told himself:

"The enemy in a fight is likely to do just what you would do if you were in his place. Verne Cole is not looking for a pitched fight. His purpose is to destroy some property, particularly my ranch, and steal back some horses. He will very likely send a small force to Deer Creek and another to the lower corner of the county, while he strikes the main blow here in the center. We have anticipated his move. Our main force is massed here, and he'll never get through."

THERE was a commotion out in the road, and one of the men out there said, "This way, follow me."

A moment later, Kentucky Belle nosed her way into the group of riders. "Captain Gaines!" panted Josie.

"Josie! What are you doing here?"

"Why, a boy came to the ranch with a message for you. His horse was broke down, so I—I brought the message on to you."

"Oh! The message—what is it?"

"The Deer Creek men sent the boy to tell you that they have only fifty men, and are not very well armed. That they have learned that a hundred or more rustlers are coming across above the north of Deer Creek, and that they can't hold them. They said they must have help."

"Something wrong about that," said Gaines thoughtfully. "If our in-

formation is correct there are not more than two hundred of Cole's band. He would make his main attack here at the crossing on the Grand. Still, we can't refuse help to those fellows. The more of the outlaws that cross above, the weaker the attack will be here in the center. . . . Dave, you know all that country. Take your company, and go to the Deer Creek Valley. Join the men there, and do what you can to hold that wing of Cole's men. If they have tricked us, and are attacking in force from that direction, send me word as soon as you learn it."

Grim Dave Short rode back to his men, and gave the order. As Short rode away from where Gaines stood, Pell asked permission to take Josie out of the crush of horsemen. When the pair had ridden almost to where old Dave sat his horse, giving orders, they stopped.

"Josie," said Pell, "if I could love you any more than I do, I would for what you have done to-night; but you must not go into such danger again. You must ride back to the Gaines ranch with Dave, and I want you to promise me that you won't leave there again to-night."

"I'll promise not to leave there, Pell, because I am not going back there. I—"

"But, Josie, you *must* go back. Any moment, we may be in a battle here, and I couldn't stand to have you in such danger."

"Listen, Pell," said Josie, calmly. "You don't know how much I love you. You can only learn from seeing me fight for you, die for you if need be. I'd rather die in a fight, with you, than to die in that ranch house without you. If they win, they will slaughter every one at the Gaines ranch, for they have a special hatred for the captain."

Pell knew that was true. After all, Josie had shown a remarkable ability to keep her head, and take care of herself in an emergency. Possibly it was because Pell was not so many generations removed from a period when a man's woman could handle a gun and take care of herself. At any rate, he said:

"I guess you are right, Josie. If you'll keep out of the line of fire, when a fight starts, you can stay." The fact was, Pell knew it was not a matter of letting her do anything. She was going to stay. "Let's ride up to where Dave is, I want to talk to him."

Short's men had just formed, and he was about to give the order to ride, when Pell approached and called him aside.

"Uncle Dave," said Pell, "I hate to be separated from you in this mess, but it's Captain Gaines's orders. What I want to say is that I don't believe any considerable band of outlaws is going to cross above Deer Creek. If you don't find many of them up there, you will know that they made that play to draw our men away from the main fight. If I was in your place, I'd strike for the lower settlement on Deer Creek. That's where they will begin. If I found that they had only made a bluff, and the Deer Creek men could hold the few outlaws that are there, I'd cross with my company at Deer Creek Point, and come down on the other side. Then when the main fight is on—"

"I see what you mean, son," interrupted Dave Short, "and I'll do just that. I wouldn't have thought of it, but my little gang could worry Cole's killers right smart, if we take 'em in the rear just at the right time. I've got to ride now. Josie, you better come with me, and I'll leave you at the Gaines ranch."

"I'm—I'm going to stay with Pell," stammered Josie.

"Why, bless you for a real woman!" Dave Short exclaimed. "If we don't all come out of this mess alive—and I reck'n we won't—good-by, and God go with you." The old warrior gripped their hands and without another word whirled his horse and galloped to his waiting men. The last word they heard him speak was in a hoarse bellow, as he yelled, "Let's go, fellows."

The rumble of hoofs told Pell and Josie that old Dave had set a pace that would take him to the Deer Creek Valley in record time.

PELL and Josie rode back to Captain Gaines. When he saw her again, the captain for once swore in the presence of a woman, but it was as much a prayer as an oath. Josie was placed in a position where she would be in the least possible danger if a fight started.

Gaines, Pell, and Stowe sat their horses in a close group in the center of the little army, after placing their men advantageously along the length of the ferry road.

The hours slipped by. From time to time, Pell rode to where Josie was sitting on Kentucky Belle, just to make sure that the girl was all right. It was past midnight, and some of the men began to yawn and wonder if after all this was just a wild-goose chase that Charlie Stowe had led them on. They talked in low tones to one another, and went on waiting.

Down at the picket line, half a mile from the river, Steve Ware was silently laughing. Discredit him, would they? Verne Cole and his band of terrible desperadoes, eh? They had been frightening children along that border

with such wild tales ever since the last Indian raid. Now Charlie Stowe had told one that had thrown the entire population of the country into a heroic fit. How Steve would have the laugh on Stowe to-morrow. He chuckled at the mere thought of it. The night was cool, and Ware told his men to build small fires a little way back in the woods.

"No use in freezing to death while we are holding the bag on Charlie Stowe's snipe hunt," he laughed. "It's midnight, but I guess they'll keep us here until morning."

Small fires sprang up back in the woods, and the men hovered over them, warming their chilled hands and smoking their pipes.

Meantime, over on the west side, Verne Cole, no longer pretending to be a ranchman, but openly leading two hundred men that he had gathered for one last great raid, was coaching his fighters.

When he had learned that his surprise raid was not going to be a surprise after all, he had shrewdly tricked the enemy by having men who were supposed to be only nesters, but were really members of his gang, take the news to Deer Creek that a hundred of his gang were going to attack that valley.

Cole knew who was the greatest leader in Emmet County. He knew who had taken the horses away from him after he had successfully stolen them. He meant to even that score by raiding the Gaines ranch the first thing when he got his men across.

He really had two hundred men, and he had not been fool enough to divide them. He was ready to move, now, and was giving final instructions to his leaders. The advance guard was ready to ford the river, above the ferry;

and feel their way out to the open prairie. After that, it would be smooth sailing.

SITTING their horses, out in the ferry road, almost a mile east of Ware's pickets, Gaines, Pell, and Judge Stowe listened intently for any sound toward the river to the west. Ware had been told to keep close watch on the ford, and at the first sound of the approaching enemy, to fall back with his men, and make contact with the main body.

"Boys, I don't like the situation," said Captain Gaines. "I'm afraid it was a mistake to send men to Deer Creek. Surely Cole has too much sense to split up his force at a time like this. He is not going into this thing blind. He probably has spies on this side who are keeping him informed. We have only about a hundred and fifty men here in our main body. I have looked them over, and they are mostly young fellows—willing enough, and most of them can shoot, but they are no match for Cole's trained killers, even if the number were equal. I have an idea that Cole's men are all in one band with him. I don't know what Steve Ware will do in a pinch. I put him where he is because I thought that at the first sound of an approaching enemy, he would give back to the main body of our men."

At that moment, Steve Ware was doing the very thing that Gaines didn't think he would do. There were a few old-time fighters in Ware's command, and these had insisted upon watching the river-crossing, in spite of Ware's sneers and joking about Charlie Stowe's ghost story. One of these old fellows hurried up to a fire where Ware stood warming himself, and reported:

"I just saw twenty men ride onto the bar, across the river."

"Good!" said Ware. "That's about right. That's old Dave Short's gang. Let 'em come on. We'll just—"

"Hadn't somebody better ride back, and tell the captain?"

"No! We don't need any help for that little bunch. There are fifty of us. Tell the men to mount. We'll ride to where the road from the ford comes out through that thick timber, into the ferry road, and lay for them. When they ride out, we'll simply hog-tie the whole outfit, and take 'em to Captain Gaines and his friends. It will be a lot of fun to see Gaines and Short, and their killer friend, Pell, when we present them with their own gang."

Ware's company moved quietly to the road that led to the ford. Dividing his men, the sheriff placed half of them on each side of the intersection. That placed his men facing each other, like two dogs on opposite sides of a rat-hole. The rat couldn't get away, but if a fight started, the enemy would be between them. Such tactics were all right for dogs and a rat, but not so good for men, using guns. The sound of horses walking slowly could be heard on the road leading from the ford. Twenty men rode fair into the trap—only it was not a trap.

"Put 'em up, you!" ordered Ware, as he jumped his horse to the middle of the road, and jerked his gun.

The reply was a volley of shots. Ware's men opened on the rustlers. Half a dozen of them went down, but Ware's men were cross-firing directly toward each other, and were inflicting as terrible damage on one another as on the enemy.

That squad of men had been only the outlaws' advance guard. Cole, with his main body, was close behind them.

When a few of the advance guard escaped and fled back to Cole, he went wild at the story they told. With a yell of rage he drove in his spurs, and led the charge. His whole band poured out into the ferry road and started a slaughter.

The struggle was short. Only two of Ware's command escaped the shambles there at the mouth of the ford road. Wild with rage, and encouraged by the easy victory, Cole, supposing that this was the main body of citizens, stormed on up the ferry road.

AT the first crash of shots, Captain Gaines, who had moved down the road until he was within half a mile of the battle, said:

"Quick, boys! Get your men lined up on the north side of the road. I'll take mine to the south side, and place them so we will not be opposite one another."

Barely had they got to their places, when two men came pounding in up the trail from the river. Gaines stopped them.

"Where is the rest of your command?" he asked.

"Why—why—we're all that's left!"

"My God! Get in here with my men."

Up the ferry road, flushed with easy victory, and thirsting for revenge against the Gaines ranch, stormed Verne Cole's band of desperadoes. They didn't know it, but they were staging the last great battle of its kind to be fought in that part of America.

The woods to the south of the road blazed and roared, as Gaines gave the order for his men to fire. A few of the outlaws went down. The column checked, halted, and formed for a fight.

Began then the real battle of the

ferry road. Gaines gave back up the road until he formed contact with Pell. As they met, Gaines said to Pell:

"I'm hit. I don't think it is very bad, but I want you to take command. I'll stay with you as long as I can."

At Gaines's prompting, Pell's voice rang out, ordering his own company to the center with Gaines's men to his left, and Stowe's fragment of a company to his right, forming them into a crescent so that Cole and his men, coming up the ferry road, would have to strike at the bottom of the bowl thus formed, giving all of Pell's men open range at them. Cole had halted his men for a breathing spell, but now they came on at a gallop.

The storm broke. Pell was at the very center of the front. His one thought at the moment was that he must get Verne Cole. Bullets were whining everywhere. Pell felt one burn through his arm. Charlie Stowe, his hat gone, was by Pell's side. The judge's right arm fell useless by his side, but he jerked a gun with his left hand, and with bridle reins in his teeth, spurred into the fight.

Pell's men were standing bravely enough; they couldn't do otherwise with such an example of bravery before them. Pell, Stowe and Gaines were holding the center as if they meant to stop Cole's men or die there.

But as fighters the citizens were no match for Cole's gunmen, and were being cut to ribbons. There was no doubt how that fight would end, if it lasted another minute.

Then two things happened in the tick of a clock. One was that Kentucky Belle came storming through the thinned ranks of Pell's men, and took her place by the side of Star, while the blaze and roar of a new gun was added to the storm. At the same moment,

while the volume of firing in front of them increased, no bullets fell among them except a few droning, spent balls.

"They are giving back!" cried Stowe.

"No!" cried Pell. "They have turned and are trying to fight their way back across the river... Come on, men!"

Down the ferry road they raced, Star and Kentucky Belle neck and neck in the lead. Something had gone wrong with Mr. Cole's plans. It was a little thing, but fraught with serious consequences.

OLD Dave Short had reached the Deer Creek Valley, finding no outlaws, but a band of citizens who should be able to take care of any that might come.

Recalling what Pell had suggested, the old ferryman had led his men across the river at Deer Creek Point, then stolen down the stream on the west side. He had left his command above the ford and gone forward alone to scout the field. He had seen Cole and his men cross into Emmet County.

Leading his own band across a little way behind them, he had massed his command on his home side of the stream by the time Cole and his men ran over Ware's band and started on to the Gaines ranch.

Dave Short halted his men. They clamored to be led on to the fight.

"Steady, now!" ordered old Dave. "You'll get to fight. If you run into 'em while they're fighting Cap'n Gaines and them, you'll do more harm than good. They are going to be whipped and driven back here directly, and they'll be in one hell of a hurry to cross the river. Just sit steady, now. Spread out and give yourselves room. Let 'em ride out onto the bar, while you keep in

the willows, and don't let any get away."

Old Dave Short was as cool about it as if he had been driving a thicket for some sort of wild game. He was in plain view of the ruins of his home, and it fairly set him wild with rage. The storm roared on, up there in the road, and old Dave got uneasy. Taking a dozen men, and ordering the others to hold their position, he made a feint rear attack on Cole.

It was enough to frighten Cole, and make him think his retreat was being cut off by an unexpected band in the rear. That, and the fact that he had met a much larger force than he had expected, had caused the outlaw chief to turn and head for the river. At the moment Cole's forces turned, old Dave gave back with his little squad, making all speed to join his main body.

In his retreat, Cole himself was in the rear, fighting back at Pell Hensley and his men, who were crowding the outlaws. Cole's men turned off the ferry road into the road that led to the ford, and went thundering on toward the crossing and safety. By the time Cole reached the mouth of the road to the ford, guns were already crashing at the river.

Cole saw how he had been trapped. He faced about, and made his last stand where the road forked. Pell's men were swarming down the ferry road. In the lead, the two thorough-breds and their dauntless riders were tearing along like the wind.

"Go on to Uncle Dave's boat, and hide in the cut!" Pell screamed to Josie, as he pulled Star to his haunches in front of Cole's position, with bullets whining around him like disturbed bees.

Before Pell's men came up, Pell and Verne Cole met, and fought a duel to

the death. Their guns roared, and Cole went from his saddle, literally shot to rags, as with his last bullet he seared Pell's cheek at such close range that the powder burned his face.

Gaines and Stowe, both wounded, came up at the head of the men, and the last of the battle was on. Hemmed in between Pell Hensley, directing the main body to the attack, and old Dave Short and his terrible sharpshooters at the river, the outlaws were trapped like rats.

Pell spread his men from the ash-pile where Dave Short's cabin had stood, far into the woods on his right, and started an enveloping movement. The fight went on for half an hour, with Pell Hensley and his big bay horse storming everywhere, and Pell's guns spouting crimson death at every opportunity.

Cole was dead, and now Pell had no interest except to win the game. He had forgotten everything else. These outlaws had wounded two of the best friends he had on earth, and they must pay, pay, pay!

A few of Cole's men did escape through the woods, but not one crossed the river at the ford. Dave Short was there, with his storm of raging hate for the men who had caused his home to be destroyed. When firing finally ceased, the barrels of old Dave's guns were almost red-hot.

As Pell's army withdrew from the woods, and gathered in the ferry road, when the fight was over, Captain Gaines, Pell, Stowe, old Dave Short, and a few of the more prominent men gathered in a little knot where the ford road came out.

"Dave," said Gaines, "we'll have to give you credit for this victory."

"No!" roared honest old Dave Short. "Give it where it is due. If

Pell hadn't told me to do it, I never would have thought of taking them in the rear," and Dave told them what Pell had said to him when he started for Deer Creek.

The story swept through the little army like a breeze. The men had already seen Pell's bravery in the fight. This was all that was needed to make him the hero of the battle.

DAYLIGHT brought a strange scene. All about the bare spot that had once been Dave Short's yard, wounded men lay on saddle blankets. Those who could ride had been sent on to town, while the desperately wounded waited on the blankets for wagons and ambulances. Captain Gaines, his face grim and drawn, Charlie Stowe, his arm still hanging by his side, and half a dozen others squatted by one of the blankets.

The wounded man on it was panting:

"Captain, I—I want you to forgive me. I was wrong all the time, but—I thought I was right. Charlie, I want you to— Hensley wouldn't touch my hand. He wouldn't speak to me, and I don't blame him. But—he's what you said he was. The bravest man you ever saw. He won't ever tell about this, he's not that kind, but— As I lay there by the side of the road, with my back broke—I—I saw him, all alone, charge Cole and his gang as they were making their last stand. It was coming—coming lighter, and I could see him plain. Tell him, Charlie—tell him for me that I know now that I was wrong, but—I thought I was right. It was just a mistake, and—"

That was the last word of Steve Ware.

A gray-haired man who had fought with Jim Gaines in the old days, but

had been with Pell in this fight, took Captain Gaines aside.

"Looks as if somebody had been reaching for you, captain."

"What do you mean—reaching for me?"

"Why, there's a bullet hole in your hat, and I've counted six more in your clothes. Are you hit anywhere?"

"There's a little blood in one of my boots, but the bone is not broken. It's just a scratch."

"Well, that wasn't what I wanted to ask you about. That young fellow, Hensley, can do more hurting damage with a few men, and not lose many of them, than any man I ever rode with. Where did he ever learn to fight like that?"

"Some men are born fighters, when their cause is just," replied Gaines, simply.

Down by the river bank, overlooking the big blue hole and Uncle Dave's ferryboat, stood Pell and Josie. Star and Kentucky Belle stood together at a little distance. The horses each had a few bullet wounds, but none of them serious. Pell had a red and black mark across his face, where Verne Cole's last bullet had fanned his face a little too closely, and a bloody handkerchief had been clumsily fastened around one of his arms.

"Pell, you—you made me run away and stay under the bank in that last fight," said Josie.

"Yes, thank God, I did."

"I—I don't intend to ever leave you in another fight."

"Let's hope there won't ever be another fight, Josie," said Pell, thoughtfully. "These are wonderful people, when you come to know them. I'd like—"

"Come on, Pell, you and Josie," called Captain Gaines. "Some wag-

ons have come to get the wounded. We are going to ride on to the ranch."

THE battle of the ferry road was history. A week had passed.

That part of the border had been most thoroughly cleared of rustlers, and the behavior of the citizens of Emmet County on that occasion made it very doubtful that another raid would ever be attempted.

Clay Gorman, who had spent the night of the battle in the safety of the old stable, was released next day at the suggestion of Judge Stowe, who had said, "He's a criminal, but he turned State's evidence. If it had not been for his testimony, there would still be doubt in the minds of some people. As it is, everybody is satisfied that Captain Gaines and Pell Hensley are the greatest men Emmet County ever knew."

Captain Gaines and Dave Short had been to town several times, but Pell stayed at the Gaines ranch, more silent and reserved than ever. One evening Pell called Gaines aside.

"Captain, have you got a little house somewhere on your place, and a piece of land that you would rent?"

"What is the matter with this house?" asked Gaines.

"Not a thing, captain, but I can't stay here always. Josie and I have been talking things over. We aim to get married, as soon as I can find a house, and fix a place to go to."

"I wouldn't hurry too much about the house. Go ahead and marry; you won't have any trouble finding a house," and there was an odd expression in the captain's eyes, as if he knew something he would like to tell, but couldn't.

It was the next afternoon that Charlie Stowe came out to the ranch.

He wore the close-fitting frock coat, the black tie and spotless linen. His shoes were glossy, and his smile was happy.

His right arm was still in a sling, but only one small bone had been broken, and it was knitting rapidly.

"Hello, folks!" he shouted happily, proffering his left hand. "I came out here to finish that interrupted wedding, if all parties are still of the same mind."

"Then we'll have to dress the bride again," said Mrs. Gaines with a grimace of mock alarm.

"No!" cried Stowe, in mock terror. "That dress was a lucky one the first time it was used—I can prove that by Captain Gaines, but it has lost its charm. I don't want this knot to slip any more. Josie is just about the prettiest thing I ever saw, in the dress she is wearing, and—"

"But, judge," interrupted Pell soberly, "Josie and I have been talking things over, and we think we ought to have a house—"

"I've got a house for you, already furnished. You can live in the county jail." Everybody laughed, except Stowe, who was solemn as a drunken owl. "No joke about it. Captain Gaines knows I've got to marry you, to keep within the law."

Again Pell's eyes went hard, but he controlled himself to stare in amazement at Stowe, whose face was now lighted with a wonderfully happy smile.

"It is like this," Stowe went on. "Captain Gaines was at county court yesterday, and he knows that Emmet County had to appoint a new sheriff after that last fight. The court was divided. Some of them wanted to appoint Pell and the others wanted to appoint Josie. I told them they couldn't

have two sheriffs under the law, but that I could make you two one. Stand up and join hands!"

EMMETSVILLE had never known such a house-warming as took place at the sheriff's home next day. The people opened their arms to the new sheriff and his bride, and greeted them as never a sheriff's family had been greeted before.

When it was all over, Charlie Stowe went back to his musty law-books. He had made a king. Now he would go on quietly watching his colony of ants, unless some one tried to dethrone his king.

A trim white cottage and a neat little store sprang from the ashes of Dave Short's burned home. There was a

stable, and a garden, too. The picket fence around the garden was white, and old-fashioned flowers bloomed there in time. Uncle Dave afterward asked Charlie Stowe how it all happened, and Charlie said:

"I don't know, Uncle Dave. The land in the bottom, on this side of Grand River, is very fertile. It might grow anything."

Often in the years to come Sheriff Pell Hensley and Uncle Dave Short were to sit on the porch in front of that white cottage, and fight over again the battle of the ferry road. Then Aunt Em and Josie would come out, and they would all silently look toward the setting sun, out beyond the Grand, and smile happily because — they had reached the end of the Crimson Trail.

THE END.

World's Last Marriage Market

AMONG the Hindu people of Tibet may be seen what is believed to be the last fragment of the ancient custom of placing maidens on the auction block. Once a year a carnival of several days' duration is held in the towns to which all the girls of marriageable age in the community are brought by their parents for "sale" in marriage.

Dressed in their best, the girls are placed in groups about the town. From far and near the swains come and look the maidens over in the manner of buyers at a public cattle sale. When a would-be benedict has been attracted by a certain damsel, he engages her parents in casual conversation.

During the talk the parents get a line on their prospective son-in-law's character. If he strikes their fancy the girl is summoned and the two young people are introduced. If the bride-to-be likes the man, the father assumes the rôle of auctioneer and haggles with the young man over the price he is to pay for the girl. Often the mercenary parent will greatly exaggerate his daughter's beauty, disposition, and culinary ability. At other times a girl will attract several admiring purchasers and, if all of them appeal to her, the bidding becomes spirited. When the sales price has been agreed upon, the young couple, accompanied by the bride's relatives, repair to the shrine of the priest, specially erected for the market marriages, and are wed, after which they enjoy the carnival.

William P. Schramm.



Allensby flung an angry retort at them

The White Parka Man

He was a good recruit, they said of Allensby in the Mounted Police, but he had wild ideas—so they sent him on a night call that should sober him

By JACK ALLMAN

SIMPKINS, of the Mounted, eased his well worn belt and snorted derisively. Then he looked at the faces of four of his companions, to make sure of his ground. As he had expected, even old Sergeant Dykes, usually the most tolerant of mortals, showed an expression of disgust. Simpkins looked appraisingly at Allensby, the young recruit who stood alone and erect in the center of the spacious log cabin that was the living quarters for the Deegs Crossing post of the Royal Canadian Mounted. Then the veteran policeman said sarcastically:

"It sure gives me a pain, the way these recruits always try to tell old-timers how to do things."

Allensby's smooth face flushed, but he squared his slender shoulders under the sarcasm. His eyes did not waver from Simpkins's face. His stiff new leather belt creaked painfully, but with his broad hat tipped jauntily over his eyes he was a picture of self-assurance.

Simpkins continued his razzing, as the four other veterans leaned back comfortably to listen. "I'm mighty thankful I'm not so damned swell-headed as to think I'm as good as

any four men in the Service! Your ideas may be hot stuff out in Ottawa, but they're just so much hooley up here in the tall timber. Grow up, baby boy, grow up."

Simpkins looked for and found approval on the faces of the other old-timers. He stretched himself out on the old issue robe that covered his rough bunk, with a derisive grunt.

"The records of the R. C. M. P. rather bear out my theory," Allensby retorted heatedly. "You'll find that by far the greater percentage of criminals that have been taken into custody by the Mounted have been arrested, or brought in dead, by a single man, not by a posse."

"Just a minute, my boy!" It was the grizzled old Sergeant Dykes that spoke. "I think you'll find there's a reason for that. There are so few of us up here in the sticks that it is a case of doing our work single-handed. Every post up here has to police a territory as large as Ireland. We can't run around much in groups. But this theory of yours, that one man has a better chance of capturing a guy than three or four, won't hold water in practice."

The old officer looked at the younger man as though he expected his words to end all argument.

"Well, my contention, sergeant, is that the smaller the body of men, the greater its mobility. Compare brigades with regiments, regiments with battalions, and so on down through companies, platoons and squads. Why not the single soldier, or policeman?"

"Bosh!" grunted Simpkins from his bunk.

"Consider also the psychological fact that a criminal, knowing there is only one man after him, will take risks that he wouldn't if the odds were

against him. A smart officer has the advantage, in that."

"Maybe I'm not smart," Simpkins interrupted, swinging his feet to the floor, "but when it comes to a tight place I'll take my chances with a couple of good side-kicks. Not recruits just out of the training barracks at Calgary; I mean real officers. I wouldn't have to worry about them getting buck fever and making a mistake in the target."

"Wouldn't be much of a loss to the Service." Allensby threw the remark back over his shoulder as he slammed the heavy door. Through the window he could be seen crossing the clearing to the big log building that housed the Hudson Bay post.

LISTEN, boys!" The old sergeant spoke quietly to the three remaining members of his little command. "Don't ride the lad too hard. That remark, Simpkins, about Calgary recruits, was uncalled-for. You know he just came up from there a week ago. He's touchy about being thrown in here with a bunch of old heads like us. We don't want any hard feelings creeping into the outfit."

"I know, sergeant; but you can't expect us to put up with that line of guff he's been spouting ever since he landed."

"Oh, let him spout! He's young yet. He'll learn." The old officer tugged at one end of his gray mustache. "One thing, the kid's got courage. He offered to take your measure yesterday, Simpkins. Your extra weight and height didn't stop him for a second when you intimated that he'd be afraid to start out alone after the White Parka Man. He came to me afterward and begged for a chance to go out and get him."

"Why didn't you tell him that we'd already have him if we knew where he was?" Simpkins sneered.

"I did just that. He said he'd go find him for me. I had a hard time keeping my face straight, but he was so damned earnest I didn't dare laugh—I honestly believe he'd have slapped my face if I had. There was a look in his eye that warned me. It was a look that I was glad to see. Mark my word, that boy's going to make good; though I agree with you fellows that he'll have to be taken down a couple of pegs before he'll ever be anything but a nuisance."

"Simp can take care of that job. It's right in his mitt," offered the red-haired one, Larkin by name. "By the way, sergeant—anythin' new about this killer that persists in runnin' around in a moose hunter's night-gown? A white parka is swell camouflage when huntin', but I don't get this bird's idea at all."

"I suppose he figures he's just that much harder to see. Word came up from the Forks this morning that one of the Hudson Bay fur buyers has been found dead over on the Basin trail. Shot. Robbed. I'm going down after lunch and check up on the story."

"Another, huh?"

"Yeah. This fellow lived long enough to write a message in the snow. He must have been 'bout done, though; all he wrote was 'White Parka Man.' Then he drew an arrow pointing down trail—looks like he might be heading back our way. Too bad we didn't get him when he was here before; we've got three murders on him already."

"He's got the whole country on edge," spoke up Randall, the fourth member of the group. "None of the moose hunters 'll wear a white parka

any more. They'd rather lose a shot than wear one of those white-hooded affairs and be taken for the killer."

"Yeah," agreed Dykes. "A white duck parka will probably get you a hundred yards closer to a moose, but you'd be miles on your road to hell if you wore one now, with the whole district out gunning for this bird."

"**S**AY, fellows; there's an idea!" The tall, rangy Simpkins had taken a quick look out of the window. In the thin white sunlight he could see Allensby talking to a group in front of the trading post. "He's over there talking to one of the fellows from down at the Forks. He'll hear about the killer being headed in this general direction, and it 'll give us a swell chance to take him down a peg."

"How do you mean?" queried the sergeant.

"While you're down there at the Forks this evening we'll have a messenger come busting in and say that the White Parka Man has been seen at the old deserted cabin halfway between here and the Forks. We'll dare Allensby to try out his one-man theory. Of course he'll make a bluff and start out, but you can bet your last month's pay that he won't go near the cabin. Team of horses couldn't pull him there, if he thinks the killer is inside. He'll probably go down the trail a ways and wait around a while. Then come back here with a long cock-and-bull story of some kind."

"I don't know, Simpkins. I really believe the lad has courage. I hate to play a trick on him; but I would like to know what he'd do." Both ends of the gray mustache came in for a severe tugging.

"I've got it, sergeant! You take that

old white parka out of the locker, there. Wrap it up and take it with you. On your way back—we can set the hour—you can slip into the cabin and put this parka on. Have a light so the kid can see there's some one in there wearing a white parka; and then you just wait and see if he's got nerve enough to enter."

"Yeah, and get my damn' fool head shot off, in case he has. Nothing doing! I don't like the idea of framing the lad, anyway."

"Aw, we'll unload his gun for him. Fill it with blanks. Come on! Let's give him a good tryout. Maybe he won't be so damn' cocky, afterward. Come on, sergeant—it 'll break the monotony, anyway. Let's have a little excitement. What d'you say?"

The others joined Simpkins in his efforts to enlist the older man's aid. If the chief was in on it, of course, the kid would have nobody to squawk to.

"Well, I guess a little joke won't hurt anything. These birds that get into the Service just because their dad happens to be a cabinet minister need their training the same as anybody," Sergeant Dykes spat, reflectively. "I would like to see just what kind of stuff young Allensby's made of, and here's a good chance."

"Fine! We'll fix things up. Leave it to us."

Simpkins picked up a pair of pliers and started removing the bullets from a number of cartridges. Then, like a housewife cutting biscuits, he stuck the end of each shell into a bar of soap, so that a disk of soap would hold the powder in place. In a few minutes he had a double handful of blanks. The sergeant stuck some of them in his pocket; the rest were to be put away until evening, when they would

replace the real bullets in the recruit's belt and gun.

AFTER the evening meal Randall and Allensby took a walk over to the trading post. During their absence Larkin and Simpkins switched the shells in the gun and belt that hung from the post at the head of Allensby's bunk. When the two men returned, Simpkins suggested a few hands of cards. Everything was in readiness for the expected visitor.

"Now, if you'd 'a' led that queen instead o'—"

Larkin's post-mortem was cut short by an excited pounding on the door.

"*Sacré nom d'un chien!* De man of de white parka!" gasped a breathless French-Canadian trapper, as Allensby threw open the door.

"What about the White Parka Man?" asked the recruit.

Sly winks passed between the other three.

The trapper braced his back against the door as though he expected it to be crashed in at any moment. He gasped for breath, looking wildly from one to another of the policemen.

"What happened?" Allensby demanded, grasping the trapper by the lapel of his heavy mackinaw and shaking him. The others jumped to their feet, and threw hurried questions at the frightened man.

"Did you see him, Frenchy?"

"Where was he? Is he headed this way?"

"Wait a minute, boys," said Simpkins, assuming the authority of a senior. "Let the Frog tell the story in his own way." He brushed Allensby aside and slipped the man by the door a knowing wink. "Now, what happened, Frenchy? Have you seen him?"

"*Mais oui!* You bet, M'sieur Seemp-

kins!" Frenchy flailed his arms in descriptive gestures. He had a native Gallic sense of drama, and played his part convincingly. Simpkins had coached him well. "I am pass by de old cabin 'tween here an' de Fork, w'en *se-e-e-eng*, one bullet pass not so far by my head! I look. It is de man of de white parka. Two, t'ree, maybe four time he shoot. *Moi*—I come away from dere, quick!"

"Men—it's him!" Simpkins said in a low voice. He wheeled back to the trapper. "You're sure it was the White Parka Man, Frenchy?"

"*Mais oui, m'sieur!* I see him wit' my own eyes."

"Now, let's see—how'll we handle this?" Simpkins demanded of the others, who were already getting into their outer clothing. "One of us ought to go down to the cabin, while the rest each take one of the trails leading into the post here. He'll be wanting food; will probably make an attempt to come in here under cover of darkness. Of course," he concluded with emphasis, "this would happen while the sergeant's gone!"

"That plan sounds all right," said Randall, sticking his foot on the table, the better to tie his moccasin. "Who goes where, Simpkins?"

"By the way, Allensby—here's a chance for you to try out your theory," Simpkins pointed out, with a sneer that he could not keep out of his voice. "Of course, if you'd rather, I'll go down to the cabin—"

"No! Let me go. I hope I meet him on the trail. It'll be easier to outwit him in the open," the recruit answered crisply. Allensby pulled a blue denim parka quickly over his head, strapped a gun around his waist, and with a light-hearted "Cheerio!" struck down the trail in a long-swinging trot. A

pale moon cast his spare shadow grotesquely over the whiteness through which the trail threaded its way down the creek.

HERE was the chance he had wanted, thought Allensby with pleasure, as he trotted along. With a little luck he'd show 'em. His inherent self-assurance precluded any fear. The healthy blood of exuberant youth tingled in his veins . . . He would have been surprised to know that at this minute Sergeant Dykes was entering the cabin for which he was headed.

At last Allensby saw a two-foot rectangle wink weakly in the darkness. A burning candle made a feeble effort to send its rays through the paraffine-soaked flour sack serving as a window in the deserted cabin. A shadow passed between the light and the translucent square. Allensby stopped. He had been running faster than he realized. Better let the air-hungry heaving of his lungs abate a bit; it would be bad for his shooting.

Silently he made his way through the brush and approached the cabin from the rear. Inch by inch he crept along the log wall to the yellow aperture in its side.

With his knife he cut a small V in an upper corner of the cloth stretched over the window, and folded the triangle back like the dog-eared page of a book. With the thumb and forefinger of his left hand he took a firm grip on the dog-ear and pulled. There was a resounding *ri-i-i-p*. The entire cloth tore loose from the hole.

Allensby had a glimpse of a man in a white parka. A fleeting glimpse—a blinding flash, almost in the recruit's face. Allensby's right arm snapped into the opening, the ugly black Webby gripped in his steady fist. His fingers

tightened. As the lifting kick of the discharged gun came back through his arm, the man in the cabin staggered. Allensby squeezed again on the black butt.

SIMPKINS watched the tall recruit out of sight down the moonlit trail.

"Soon as Dykes opens up with his blanks the kid's going to have delirium tremens," the tall officer remarked, with a short laugh. "And it 'll take some of the cockiness out of him when he finds it was the sergeant."

Other plans were made for riding the recruit, a cabinet minister's son who had got his job through pull. Many jokes were bandied back and forth, and the black bottle of Hudson Bay rum made the rounds.

"Come on, let's have a three-handed game of solo while we're waiting," said Simpkins, as he glanced at the oily-faced alarm clock. Allensby was only fifteen minutes on his way.

"Yeah, we got plenty of time," said Randall. "If the sergeant plays his part, we may have to go to Ottawa to bring the kid back. He won't stop till he can get his mother's arms around his neck. Then he can tell her what the bad mans tried to do to him."

There was a fresh outburst of loud laughing.

Then, abruptly, Simpkins's laughter was strangled, died to a gurgle. With a single leap he crossed the room. Flinging out a nervous oath, he broke open the gun hanging to the upright of Allensby's bunk. Brass shells without bullets. Round, yellow eyes of soap stared accusingly at him from the palm of his hand.

"Larkin! Randall!" Simpkins cried in horror. "The kid took my gun

instead of his own! He'll murder Dykes!"

"Took your gun?" the other two men cried in unison.

"Get Frenchy! Have him hook up the dogs. Hurry! Don't stand there like a couple of idiots!" The tall policeman threw the blank shells after the now hurrying Randall. "We'll be too late. It's only two miles, and he was running when he left."

In felt house slippers, bareheaded, but unconscious of the cold, the three men helped throw the trapper's team into the harness. Frenchy insisted on driving. No time to argue. They were off.

The flying feet of the dogs threw small particles of hard-packed snow into the faces of the three frightened men clinging to the basket sides of the careening sled. Wild French curses flew thick and fast over their heads as the long string of malemutes tore down the creek trail.

"In the name of Heaven, Simp—the next time you start out to play a joke use something besides loaded guns!" snapped Randall, adding a series of strong adjectives describing Simpkins. "It 'll be murder if that kid gets to the cabin. Dykes's gun is loaded with blanks. The kid has a gun and belt full of real bullets. Nice situation. Glad I wasn't in it."

Larkin clawed a handful of ice pellets from his shirt collar.

"What d'you mean, 'wasn't in it'?" he demanded. "You're in it as deep as anybody."

Simpkins was urging Frenchy for more speed.

"Say—Allensby must have run all the way!" he whispered hoarsely, as the light of the cabin window appeared through the trees.

Three heads came up with a jerk.

Distinctly the sound of a shot was heard to echo in the still, night air . . . It was at this moment that Allensby had ripped out the window.

"We're too late!" Simpkins groaned. "Murder! Ugh!" The tall officer wiped the cold sweat of horror from his face, as the sounds of other shots came to him.

"Swell mess you got us into, Simpkins!" observed Randall bitterly. "No chance to cover this up. It means our jobs . . . and it'll be manslaughter for you."

A last, lone shot rang out as Frenchy swung his team up to the cabin. The three policemen wedged through the door at the same time.

"OH, it's you, is it?" Allensby lowered the gun he had turned on the three when the door burst open. "You birds were just too late to see the fun." The recruit's voice was pitched high, but steady. The gleam of triumph burned brightly in his clear blue eyes.

Six startled eyes took in the scene at a glance. Saw the figure in the white parka stretched face down on the floor. Saw a little red trickle, starting under the head and crawling slowly down the center of one of the warped floor boards.

"Oh, God, this is awful!" groaned Simpkins, out of a chaff-dry throat.

"What have we done?" Randall's words were almost inaudible. A shudder shook his spare frame. He'd worked with Sergeant Dykes for seven years. It was ghastly to see him go out this way, the result of a foolish prank.

"Why, Allensby, you're wounded!" Larkin's cry stabbed the air like a knife. The eyes of Simpkins and Randall swung from the body on the floor toward the dapper recruit. For the first

time they noticed that his left arm hung uselessly at his side. A dark stream ran across the back of his hand and dripped from the ends of his fingers.

"Yeah; he got me in the shoulder, the first shot."

"Gunnugh!" A strangling sound from one of the dark corners of the cabin interrupted Allensby's recital. He holstered his gun and grabbed the flickering candle, exploringly. The dim light revealed a writhing bundle of furs and rawhide lashings—a prisoner.

"Well, I'm damned!" shouted Allensby, as soon as he had whipped the gag from this man's mouth. "It's the sergeant!"

At the same moment Simpkins was turning over the body on the floor. The glassy, sightless eyes of a black-browed, unshaved corpse stared into his startled face. A concerted gasp of astonishment escaped from the three conspirators. This, beyond a doubt, was the White Parka Man.

Dykes, released from his bonds, staggered to his feet. He caught Simpkins's eye—they could never let Allensby know.

"Say, that was a crack I got!" Dykes, who had come early to impersonate an outlaw, tenderly caressed a hen's egg over a frost-marked ear. "I was coming up from the Forks," he gasped out, thinking up his story as he went along, "when I saw smoke coming out of the cabin, here. I tied the dogs along the trail and came in to investigate. That so-and-so of a White Parka killer was behind the door. He crowned me. While I was unconscious he trussed me up with *babiche*. Brought me to, so as to tell me that it wasn't every day he had a chance to capture a policeman. He was going to hold me for ransom." The sergeant

rubbed his wrists where the caribou thongs had cut into the flesh. "'Bout that time the kid here stuck his head through the window. There was Sheol popping 'round here for a few minutes."

Frenchy edged over and took a close look at the dead body on the floor. He searched the faces of his three late passengers.

"*Moi, je ne comprends pas.* I no understand'. You tol' me de man of de white parka is not aroun' here—"

"Shut up!" Simpkins spit the words out with a snap. "You aren't supposed to understand—anything." He gave Larkin a look that spoke volumes, then with a nod of his head toward the Frenchman, he jerked a thumb in the

direction of the door, and the red-haired man led the trapper out of the cabin.

"Look here!" exclaimed Allensby. "Here's another white parka rolled up on the floor. Do you suppose there's two of him?"

"No, son, I don't think so," Dykes said. "I guess you got the only one there is. I'm sure grateful to you, lad." The grizzled officer stuck out a hard, rough fist.

The recruit gripped the sergeant's huge paw in his one good hand. "I'm glad I had the chance, sergeant. And say—will you drop my old man a line? He wanted me to study for the clergy; disowned me when I enlisted. I'd like to let him know I'm making good."

THE END.



"Thar's Gold in That Thar Ocean, Pardner!"

FOR untold centuries gold in minute particles has been washing into the oceans, never to be recovered. A rather startling fact, but one generally known among gold miners.

Just as the mountain streams washed the gold particles down to lower levels where they were panned out by the hordes of Forty-Niners in the days when California was young, so, too, did these streams carry much of the gold on into the open sea. And they still do so.

Five tons of sea water will contain about one cent's worth of gold. Yet a process has now been developed that promises profitable gold recovery from the ocean. The process will not attempt to recover the gold in the ocean bottom sands, but will trace out the minute showings in the water itself.

Sea water is piped into a tank, the bottom of which is covered with iron ocher. This iron ocher breaks up the chemical forces in the sea water and attracts the gold to it, after which the iron ocher is removed and the gold is extracted by the usual cyanide process. An agitator keeps the water moving so that all gold present ultimately comes in contact with the iron ocher.

The gold content of different samples of ocean water varies greatly, so that while large scale mining operations close it to the small operator, there is a possibility that prospectors may roam the ocean's surface seeking high-paying stretches of water which they will reveal to ocean gold mining companies for a tidy stipend.

Harold J. Ashe.



"That's it, Dan—murder! I shot the rat"

Brains Beat Bullets

He couldn't plug a tomato can at five paces; yet Larry Martin, up-and-coming prize fighter, grabbed a six-gun and pitched into the underworld

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

BENNY RUBIN, gangster, was shot down in front of an underworld speakeasy on the Bowery. With a scream he pitched to the gutter and died, still grabbing for his automatic.

Half an hour later young Larry Martin burst into Dan O'Connor's room in a small hotel up in the Broadway theatrical district. He slammed the door behind him and snapped the catch on the lock.

"I—I guess the fight's off for next Saturday!" he blurted.

O'Connor, rotund, moon-faced, but with a certain strength in the firm lines of his mouth, looked up from the sporting page he was reading, thrust the

folded newspaper between his pudgy body and the broad upholstered arm of the chair in which he sat, and stared at Larry.

"You're a bum guesser, kid!" he snapped. "You can take 'Slugger' Sloane—easy. It's your chance to get into big money. Nothing short of murder— Hey, what's the matter? Sick?"

Larry had suddenly gone white. His hands twitched nervously as he took a step forward, lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper. "That's it, Dan—murder. I shot Benny Rubin, the dirty rat that killed my brother. I—I had to do it to square up for Mitch."

The fighter's mouth twisted into a self-contemptuous sneer. "Yeah, me!

Larry Martin, cleanest kid in the fight racket. That's what the papers call me. That's the way the fans knew me. I can't step under the floodlights no more. I got blood on my hands, Dan. Don't you understand? Blood—the blood of murder. I'm a killer now like the rest of them."

His voice trailed off into a series of hard, hysterical laughs.

"But I didn't mean to drag you into it, Dan. Honest I didn't," added Larry, dropping into a chair opposite his manager.

"Me? You're off your nut!"

Goose pimples started crawling up and down Dan's flesh. The prospect of being drawn into a gang feud, the possibility of stopping gangster's lead with his portly physique, held no appeal for O'Connor.

In his whole career Dan had never trafficked with the underworld. He had always kept his fighters clean, too. From the time he had picked Larry up, from a bunch of third-raters in a sock and slam rodeo in Butte, Montana, he had firmly believed that the clear-eyed youngster, still in his early twenties, was just a lithe-limbed, fast-stepping, hard-hitting prize fighter, forging rapidly to the head of his class under careful handling and good management.

DAN was quick-tempered. His first emotion was a mad fury to think that he had been taken in by Larry's open face, his big blue eyes, soft as a woman's except when he was in the ring, when they froze to ice.

"So you're a killer!" he snarled. "A low, rotten gun-slinger. Beat it! I don't have no truck with your kind. I don't even know you."

Larry looked at Dan, and for a minute his eyes froze. He rose slowly from his chair.

"I guess you're like the rest. I don't blame you, Dan. Only, I thought you were different. Thought you might give me a chance to explain. That's why I came here."

"Explain what?" snapped Dan. "A murder?"

"Yes. Explain what you call a murder. I suppose you'd like a chance to tell me I ought to fry in the chair; that I'm a menace to society. Bunk! But you wouldn't understand, anyhow. You're too thick-skulled to see the real issue."

There was a bitterness and a desperation in Larry's high-pitched voice that touched Dan deeply. He had always liked Larry more than any other fighter he had ever handled. His temper cooled off as suddenly as it had flared up.

"Aw, sit down and take the load off your brains. Tell me about it." Dan's voice softened. "Maybe I can help you."

Larry had never told any one about Mitch before; Mitch, his older brother whom he had literally worshiped from the time he was a child, Mitch who had been slain by a double crossing gangster.

At sixteen Mitch looked twenty, and drove a truck for a wholesale biscuit concern. He and Larry lived in a cheap little flat on Ninth Avenue. Mitch paid the rent, bought the groceries, and fought off the welfare society agents who wanted to put Larry into an institution where he would be "properly cared for."

Mitch helped Larry with his lessons, pasted him on the nose when he played hookey from school, made him wash his freckled kid's face before supper, and taught him to lick the neighbors' children.

Later Mitch changed his job. He

got more money running hooch, but because he played straight with his employers he got in wrong with the double crossers in the racket. Honor among crooks? That was a laugh, Mitch knew. Finally Benny Rubin, an under-boss in Mitch's outfit, who at the same time was selling out to Joe Nova, a rival figure new in gangdom then, put it right up to Larry's brother: Either Mitch would knuckle down to Benny, or . . .

Mitch wasn't the kind that scares easily. He told Benny to peddle his papers elsewhere. Benny got sore. Mitch knew too much. Benny was afraid he'd squeal, and with diabolical cunning he planned to do what would hurt Mitch most—get him through his kid brother, Larry. He didn't have the nerve to go after Mitch, so he got ready to bump off the kid. Dirty, but typical of Benny.

Mitch heard about it, and shipped Larry out West, where he knew the kid would be safe. For a while he sent the boy money regularly.

Then it happened. Benny slipped Mitch six lead slugs in the back; and Larry, who had grown to depend on his older brother for everything, could not understand why his remittances ceased. When he did find out, he was too broke to come East.

"Mitch was killed three years ago," said Larry to Dan. "When you wanted to make a fighter out of me, I thought I saw my chance to get back to New York and square things. Don't the Bible say, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'? My only prayer was that Benny wouldn't be bumped off till I got here to do the job.

"I didn't know the fight game would get me so. The crowds yelling. The thrill of getting your hands taped . . . Aw, I was just kidding you at first,

Dan. Now . . . what's the use? I'm through."

"H'M," grunted Larry's manager. "Well, you set still here while I go out and get something to eat. I'll bring it back, and we can chow up in the room."

Dan had a feeling he was being trailed as he left the hotel. Furtive men seemed to brush past him, their hands in coat pockets, their hats pulled low over their eyes. Maybe he just imagined it.

Besides some sandwiches and a container of coffee, he brought back the evening papers. They said little about the shooting other than to announce that the city's gang wars had flared anew with the killing of Benny Rubin, and to predict swift vengeance on the man who had been rash enough to slay Joe Nova's first lieutenant.

What a yarn the real story would have been, thought Dan: Larry Martin, popular prize fighter, straightest kid in the game, murders to avenge his brother. Boy, howdy! Front page stuff, what?

In the evening some reporters came. Only sports writers. Dan was relieved. They asked no embarrassing questions. Having no definite plans, Dan fed them a ton of ballyhooey about Larry's condition, his right, his potent left jabs, and his high-powered footwork.

The cops didn't bother Larry. It wasn't likely that they ever would. Undoubtedly they considered the abrupt demise of Benny Rubin good riddance, and although they went through the formal motions, they were not particularly interested in who killed him. As usual in such killings, they left it up to the irate Joe Nova himself to get the man who had bumped off his right bower. Dog eat dog.

Joe lost no time about it, either. Late at night Dan went out for a little air and some cigars. On the street, Dan peered up and down the block cautiously, then started for the cigar store still open on the corner.

He was halfway toward his objective when his derby was slapped off his head. A dim figure was blazing away at him from a darkened doorway across the street. Dan turned and bolted for the hotel, ran faster than he had ever run in his life. It was astonishing how rapidly his legs moved in a galloping waddle.

Dan hammered violently on the door to be let in. Larry had locked it.

"Hey!" he shouted excitedly. "The dopes are shooting at me now. Beat it! I don't want to get the works on account of your troubles."

Puffing like a grampus, his face red with rage and exertion, he dropped into his favorite chair. Larry walked toward the door.

"I just wanted to tell you that I won't let you down on that fight, Dan. I'm going to face Slugger Sloane for you—my last appearance in the ring."

"Yeah, if you live that long!" snapped Dan. "Never mind the fight. I'll stand losing the forfeit money, but I won't get shot at on account of any ham pug."

Larry argued, long and forcibly. In the end Dan gave in. "All right, then. That's settled. We'll go through with it; and after that I'm through with you, and you're through with the prize ring. Turn in on the couch here and get some sleep. I'm going to bed in the alcove."

DAN tossed about on his pillows. What snatches of sleep he managed to steal were broken into by dreams of being invited to go for a ride by grim gunmen, of being fol-

lowed by stealthy, evil-faced killers. Yet in spite of these nightmares there was something else that persisted in crowding itself on his mind, and its importance grew on him.

He recalled how assiduously Larry had practiced pistol shooting when they were in the West. Every afternoon when they weren't riding on a train, Larry could be found out at the edge of town banging away at tin cans with his six-gun. Dan had often joked about it. He knew now there had been a definite purpose behind all that target practice; and the thing that struck him more and more forcibly now was Larry's rotten marksmanship. The kid wasn't just a poor shot. He was terrible. Couldn't hit a barn door, much less knock a tomato can off a fence rail, even at close range.

Had Benny Rubin been shot point-blank, had Larry gone up to him and let him have it, Dan would not have doubted. Yet, according to the boy's own story—and Dan believed him—he had been nearly a block away when he saw Rubin come out of the speakeasy; he had fired just one shot, watched his victim fall, and then dashed around the corner and hopped into a taxi.

It might have been a fluke hit, that one shot. Dan wondered. The paper said only one shot had been heard; one bullet had done the business, passing clean through Benny's body.

Dan determined to conduct a private investigation.

He was up before dawn. Leaving a note for Larry telling him to remain where he was all day, Dan quietly left the hotel unmolested. No one followed him. He guessed the attack of the previous night had been just a warning, advice for him to keep out of things that didn't concern him.

In the drab half-light of early morn-

ing the Bowery was dismal, and almost deserted. One or two slant-eyed yellow men, their hands folded in front of them in the capacious sleeves of their loose silk jackets, pattered noiselessly toward Mott Street in New York's Chinatown district. A few drunks sprawled in grotesque attitudes on the sidewalk, dead to the world, sleeping off the night's potations. At infrequent intervals an elevated train rumbled by overhead.

DAN located the speakeasy in front of which Benny Rubin had been killed. It was closed at that early hour. A recently scrubbed spot on the sidewalk, dirty but not as dirty as the adjacent pavement, showed where Benny had fallen. Dan began hunting for something. His fingers searched high and low over the rotting, cracked, paint-faded lintel of the speakeasy doorway.

Suddenly he whistled. Level with his head were three gouges, the wood freshly splintered as if bullets had recently plowed into it. Dan took out his penknife and dug. Three steel-jacketed slugs rewarded his industry. He wasn't sure, but they looked too small to be .45's, and he smiled as he pocketed his treasures. Evidently somebody besides Larry had held a grudge against Benny Rubin, somebody with a Maxim silencer attached to his rod, most likely. That would account for only a single shot being heard. Dan believed less than ever that it was Larry's shot that had drilled the gangster's heart.

A policeman came down the street, twirling his night stick.

"Kinda early for a drink, bo'. Mike's is open, but take a tip from a wise guy. Stick to beer. Lay off the 'smoke.' You'll last longer."

"O K," Dan said, and smiled to

himself. "Wise guy," he muttered under his breath. "Them roundsmen don't know nothing."

He waited till the policeman passed on, then resumed his inch by inch search over the doorway of the speakeasy. So high above his head that he had to stand on his toes to reach it, was another freshly splintered chip in the lintel. Dan stretched up and probed it with his knife. A lead slug, broad, heavy, flattened at the nose, dropped to the sidewalk. He picked it up eagerly.

It was larger than the others. A .45, he guessed—the bullet from Larry's Western style six-gun. And it had never struck Benny. Too high. With his knife, Dan made a scratch in the doorway to mark the spot from which he had taken it.

He wasn't a man given much to soliloquizing, but his excitement and elation were too much for him.

"All I've got to do now," he mumbled, "is get ahold of one of those fancy gun experts with a microscope and have him match up this slug with Larry's gun, and the kid is in the clear. I knew he couldn't hit the back of a hack at ten paces."

At the time he wasn't particularly interested in who had actually killed Benny Rubin.

Larry was just getting up when Dan returned to the hotel and greeted him with a resounding slap on the back.

"Trot out the old gat, kid!" Dan was beaming, proud of himself. "You didn't knock off Rubin. You only think you did. I can prove it, too. Then we'll look up Joe Nova, tell him to call off his mob men and go after the right guy, and every little thing will be hunky-dory. Boy, brains will beat bullets every time."

Larry was speechless. He didn't

understand. Even when Dan explained he didn't know whether to be glad or sorry. He was glad Benny was dead, half sorry his hadn't been the avenging lead, and at the same time glad, very glad that his hands were not stained with the blood of a human being—even though it was a gang leader.

"Anyhow," he stammered, bewildered, "I tried to square it up for Mitch."

"Aw, snap out of it!" barked Dan. "Get the gun."

Larry hesitated. "I—I can't, Dan. I threw it down a sewer grating on the corner before I got into the cab."

"Huh? You what?"

Dan plumped into his chair and grabbed for a cigar. It was some time before he was sufficiently composed to speak again.

"All right," he said finally. "You wait here. Have a bell hop bring you some breakfast. I'm going to look up Joe Nova, anyhow."

Before Larry could protest he was gone.

STEVE WATSON was an ex-pug whom Dan O'Connor had used formerly as a sparring partner for some of the boys on his string. Steve had quit the training camps to go into the liquor game. He knew practically everybody.

He ran a speakeasy off the Bowery—a "bit house." Most of his customers were men who had done a bit in Sing Sing. They made a clubhouse out of his place, an alumni society for criminals who had done time. Dan decided to look up Steve before visiting Joe Nova.

"Joe Nova?" Watson edged Dan off to one end of the bar, out of earshot of the rest of his customers. "Plenty disliked. Came here with a rep for

bein' a savage killer. You know how that stuff works—the old what-do-you-call it psychology. Same as in the fight racket. If enough guys spread it around that Steve Watson was lightnin' on the draw and a tough bird to handle, the first thing you know everybody would be believin' it. Next I'd believe it myself. That's when I'd be dangerous. Tryin' to live up to me rep. Get me, Dan?"

Steve leaned his bloated, red face across the bar and whispered into Dan's ear: "That's Joe. Tough because he's tryin' to live up to his rep. I wouldn't fool with him. Bad medicine."

"Yeah?" Dan asked Steve some more questions, but Steve just shook his head.

"If you want the low-down, get ahold of 'Grapevine' George. He's a stoolie. Knows everything, and he'll spill it for a price. Tell him I sent you."

"Thanks," said Dan starting to leave.

"By the way," Steve called after him, "that new fighter of yours got himself into some kind of trouble with Nova and the boys, didn't he?"

"Did he?" snapped Dan coldly, as he went out into the street again.

Grapevine George was in a Turkish bath when Dan finally found him. He was a slinky, ferret-eyed rogue, defiant one moment, cringing the next. He looked incongruous, wrapped in a white sheet with a bath towel wound around his pink, bald head.

"Me? Aw, you got me wrong. I never heard of Joe Nova." Those were his first remarks. Later he changed his tune. "Sure, mister, I'll talk. But not here. I'm warnin' you it'll cost dough. Say, my life wouldn't be worth a nickel if anybody was to find out I told you.

Meet me at the Aquarium in an hour. And don't forget the jack, mister."

DAN went down to the Aquarium at Battery Park to wait. He wandered about for some time, watching the seals in the big tank in the center of the building. Suddenly he felt some one nudge his shoulder. He turned. Grapevine George was standing beside him.

George drew Dan to one side. The price for his information was fixed and paid.

"Nova knocked off Benny himself," whispered Grapevine with a knowing wink. If he noticed Dan start, he gave no indication of it.

"Nova!"

"Sure, Joe Nova. He's slick. It was him got Benny's nerve up to kill Mitch Martin three years ago. Promised to make him his top man if he did the job. Lately Benny'd been gettin' upstage. Thought he was a hot shot, himself. Nova figured he was plannin' to get a mob of his own and start an opposish'. So Nova lay for a week in a room across the way from the speak-easy, waitin' for a chance to pick off Benny. He ain't got the nerve he's supposed to have. Scared to shoot it out with Benny, he was. So he laid for him with a silenced gat, and this prize fighter guy, Mitch's kid brother, comes here and plays right into his hands.

"Nova and the kid must of seen Benny at the same time. Both let him have it. Nova told the boys it was the kid done it. Some of them was friends of Benny's. He's gettin' in solid with his bunch by havin' 'em lay for young Martin. Mister, that feller 'll never get to no Garden for any fight with Slugger Sloane. He's marked—on the spot. It was a lucky break for Nova. You gotta hand it to him. He's smart."

"Yeah," said Dan dully. "He's damn' clever, all right."

Grapevine George melted away into the crowd and disappeared. Dan remained staring at the seals. His fine plan for clearing Larry officially and for getting the gang leader's rodmen off the boy's trail had collapsed like a house of cards in a wind.

Tell Nova to hunt for the real killer when he himself had done the job! Swell!

Dan didn't know what to do next. The only thing he could think of was to keep Larry under cover till the night of the fight, and hire armed protection to escort him to the ring. Armed protection. Dan shuddered. He hated the growing dominance of the underworld, the power of organized gangdom that seemed to increase with every new killing.

He went back to the hotel and sadly told Larry the news.

"You mean it was Nova—Joe Nova that was really responsible for Mitch's murder?" Larry's voice was tense with suppressed excitement. His heart was pumping wildly.

Dan apparently didn't notice the strain Larry was under.

"Yeah," he said wearily, "and it's lucky you threw your gat away, or you'd get into more trouble."

Larry's fists clenched.

"I'm going out, Dan."

"The hell you are!"

But Larry had gone. He had the elevator take him down to the basement, and he left the hotel by the service entrance.

THE afternoon was well on the wane before Larry found any one who could direct him to Nova's place. He wrote down the address and found it, a dingy, dirt-incrusted, dilap-

idated brick building in the shadow of the old Brooklyn Bridge. He pushed open the front door, took the first flight of stairs two at a time and stopped in front of a heavy grilled doorway backed by a sliding panel of steel. He could hear voices within.

He rapped on the door, and after a few seconds the panel was slid back. A face peered out at him.

There was something about Larry's crisp demand to see Joe Nova that caught the keeper of the gate off his guard.

"The chief's playin' pinochle. Can't disturb him," said the face behind the grille.

"I know it!" snapped Larry. "Open up."

The door was opened, and Larry walked straight past an ornate private bar over which hung an expensive set of sporting prints into a room at the rear which he entered without knocking. Four men looked up from their cards as Larry shut the door after him. Four hands reached for hips, or shoulder holsters.

"Sorry to kibitz a little in this game," snapped Larry. "Which one is Joe Nova?"

"Say, you've got a hell of a nerve, kid," growled Nova, a tall, bulky and leonine man with bulging, rounded shoulders and arms thick with rolls of muscle buried in fat. He pushed his chair back from the table, then took his hand away from his gun, and his companions followed his example.

"You don't need to be scared—big shot!" Larry spat the last words out contemptuously. "I threw my rod away some time ago."

"Aw, come on, Joe," said one of his companions. "Who's the kid? What does he want? Throw him out. Let's get on with the game."

Suddenly Joe's round, pig-like eyes lighted with the cunning of his breed.

"You're Larry Martin, ain't you, kid? Mitch Martin's brother?"

Larry nodded. The gang leader turned triumphantly to the three men at the table beside him. Two of them had been pals of Benny Rubin.

"Mitch's brother!" he snarled. "The guy that knocked off Benny."

He started a coarse, mirthless chuckle. The men about him tensed, sensing the voltage in the air, but they were entirely unprepared for Larry's swift reply.

"I shot at him, you mean. You're the guy that killed him, you dirty, cheap rat!"

NOVA was on his feet in an instant, tumbling his chair behind him as he jumped up. His hand went for his hip. He was fast, but Larry's fists were chain lightning.

Nova fired from his hip as a stinging right caught him on the jaw, spun him around. The bullet plowed into a wall. A left hook caught Nova behind the ear, felled him like a poled ox for all his weight advantage over the slighter man, and his gun clattered to the floor as he landed. Larry kicked it under the table.

Nova's companions, guns drawn and trained on Larry, had retreated to the door. They were joined by those who had been at the bar in the outer room. None moved forward to help their chief. Benny's pals held them back.

Larry gripped Nova by the vest, nearly ripped it off him as he jerked the raging gangster to his feet.

"For once you're going to fight like a man!" he snapped. "Put up your dukes."

Pow! Pow! Slam! Bam! Larry's fists rocked the big man's head

from side to side. The punches seemed to clear Nova's head after the knock-out blow that had carried him to the floor. With a savage bellow he rushed at Larry.

The attack was sudden. Before he could cover up, Larry felt the heavier man's hammerlike fist catch him full between the eyes. He staggered, tripped over the overturned chair and fell. Nova leaped for him, clutching for a grip on Larry's throat.

Over and over the two men rolled, fighting, clawing, slugging at each other with no let-up. Nova on top, then Larry.

With an effort Larry broke free of Nova's hold and scrambled to his feet. He dragged Nova up after him. The man was whimpering, whining, protesting that he had had enough. He cursed at those in the doorway, urging them to do something, but not a man there moved. The mob was getting a new slant on their chief, a picture that wasn't adding anything to his prestige. Nova sagged. He would have dropped to the floor again had not Larry held him up with one hand while he measured him off with the other. Larry's right drew back slowly, hesitated a moment, snapped forward like a whiplash.

Crack! Only the whites of Joe Nova's eyes showed as the blow caught him squarely under the chin, snapped his head back with a report like a gun shot. *Thud!* Nova crumpled to the floor, groaning feebly. He was out, cold as a fish.

Larry turned to face the menacing, bewildered, electrified group in the doorway.

"Shall I let him have it now?" muttered one of the card players to his fellows, raising his automatic.

"You do and I'll drill you, Jack," growled the man next him, as his gun found the ribs of the first speaker and bored into them. "We been saps to let a yellow skunk like that Nova buffalo us. I think the kid was givin' it to us straight about who bumped off Benny, at that. Benny was a pal of mine. If Joe Nova done it—" His threat remained unfinished.

Without flinching, Larry walked straight toward the doorway. He pushed aside the man who held a gun leveled at his breast.

"I'm going now," he said quietly. Then he turned and pointed to the inert figure on the floor. "There's the bird that murdered Benny Rubin," he said. "Big shot!"

DAN O'CONNOR paced up and down the room in his hotel, tearing at the roots of his brick-red hair.

"Oh, you're crazier than I thought!" he moaned. "Crazier than a bowlegged cockroach."

"But, Dan," Larry tried to explain for the fortieth time in ten minutes. "I knew that if I licked the leader of the pack, the wolves would finish him off themselves. I was taking your advice. Brains are better than bullets."

"Brains?" shrieked Dan. "Brains, to go up to that gang's headquarters without a gun to lick the leader in a fist fight?" Suddenly his voice softened. "Never mind, kid. You're champ timber. Nerves of steel and no sense, no sense a-tall. You'll take Slugger Sloane easy."

"I think so," said Larry, quietly. "I've squared it up for Mitch. I've signed Nova's death warrant, but his blood won't be on my hands. That's the way Mitch would have wanted it."

THE END.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

ANTHONY M. RUD

Author of "Strong Man," "Big Casino," "Smoke Segrue," etc.

AMERICAN. Father naturalized Norwegian. Mother of Mayflower stock. Both of them M. D.'s. I am thirty-seven, six feet two, weigh one hundred and ninety, am married, have three children, like dogs, detest cats—and wish that my own youngsters and the neighbors' children, who are playing "sting-gool" in the yard, would start a conspiracy of silence for a few minutes so I could hear this typewriter click.

More or less educated at St. John's Military Academy, Dartmouth College, and Rush Medical. Worked for C. & N. W. Railway, Sears Roebuck's, Canadian National Railways, Hudson's Bay Company, *Technical World* (*Illustrated World*) Magazine; free-lanced fiction and articles four years, running a 1919 Studebaker through forty-three States of the forty-eight, and living for two years in the piney-woods of Alabama—at Citronelle, the scene of "Smoke Segrue," which appears in this issue. Then moved to Pass Christian, Mississippi. Back again to Alabama to study the Cajans, when my first

movie and novelette of them did rather well. Finally to New York, curious to see the inside of a fiction magazine. Worked for Doubleday's, assistant and associate editor on *Short Stories* and *West*, respectively. Then went to Butterick's to edit *Adventure*, *Romance* and *Everybody's*.

Now I am free-lancing fiction and articles, and writing a series of dramatic (so-called) presentations for the radio. Have done a couple of novels, and had several magazine stories reprinted and sold more or less novels. Several movies, the best of which were (as 'I see it, that is) "The Brotherhood of Hate," "Scars of Jealousy," and "King of the Klondike." In all, some five million words of published material, including everything.

ARGOSY published one of the first stories I ever wrote, back in 1915 (?). It was "The Killer," a personification of the awful paper-chute at Sears Roebuck's—now happily abolished. Needless to say, now I am back to steady writing again, I hope to please you consistently and often.





Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



FROM the far places of the earth, loyal Californians rise to the defense of their State:

Island of Aruba, Dutch West Indies.

I have been reading your magazine for about twenty years and have always found it well worth the money paid for it.

To-night I read a story by Harold de Polo called "The Liar Tells the Truth." It was quite a yarn. On the last page of the story was an article called "Wandering Waterspouts," by Charles B. Dean. He tells of waterspouts invading the suburbs of Los Angeles. Factories and dwellings were torn down, motor cars were moved around, people were lifted up in the air to be set down in another town. Octopuses were found in people's gardens. Where did that guy Dean get his whisky?

I have lived on the beach twenty miles below Los Angeles for thirty-five years, and I never saw or heard of any such thing as he mentions. In my opinion he should be the hero in Harold de Polo's story, "The Liar Tells the Truth" (but not in this case).

J. A. HEARD.

LIKES, dislikes, and a suggestion are included in this reader's letter:

Pittsburgh, Pa.

I just wish to get on the wagon with the rest of your many admirers, and give my vote for ARGOSY. I've been reading it for about six years and during that time I never missed an issue; and the only stories I did not like were several Western stories that you printed, and some of those impossible trouble stories by Edgar Franklin.

MacIsaac leads the list with me—no matter what he writes about, his stories hold a real kick. I especially liked "The Mental Marvel" and "A Great Man's Shoes."

F. V. W. Mason is a close second; his story, "Captain Nemesis," was as good as I have ever read. I also enjoyed "His Service to Folly," but I can't recall who wrote it.

Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's two stories have been very good.

I like Kline's impossible stories, but I never cared for any that Farley wrote until his last one about the world conquest.

I like historical novels very much. Is Mason going to give us any more? I think that a sequel to "Captain Nemesis" would be appreciated by the majority of your readers. However, regardless of what kind of stories you print, your selection has been very good, but please don't forget MacIsaac and Mason.

Would it be possible to have a few stories which deal with Pittsburgh as the center? I've traveled a lot, but this town is as interesting as any I've been in—if not more so.

JACK BROWN.

AN enthusiastic reader lists a few favorites:

Black River Falls, Wis.

I have only started reading ARGOSY since the end of last year and I have missed only the numbers when the dealer was sold out.

ARGOSY has the best stories of any magazine I have ever read. Your authors are all good. Among the best are Erle Stanley Gardner and his "Whispering Tales," Robert Carse with his stories of the Foreign Legion, J. Allan Dunn—I would like to see a six-part serial of the south seas by him.

Theodore Roscoe can certainly write a story that will hold one's interest. I would like to see a serial by him also. I like the impossible stories. "The Trail of Deceit" is the finest Western I have ever read. "The Man of Gold" is another fine story and "The Sapphire House" has started out well. Keep ARGOSY as it is by all means, and don't be afraid to give too much of J. Allan Dunn and Theodore Roscoe.

The "Your Choice Coupons" are no good because they have only five blanks. I have not found a story in ARGOSY that I disliked for some time.

I forgot to mention John H. Thompson of *Bill* and *Jim* fame; don't lose him by any means.

JAMES NOBLE.

HERE is some outspoken criticism.

Incidentally, Mr. Greenfeld must have missed the two stories in which *John Solomon* returned. A. Merritt's serial starts October 25.

New York City.

I have two complaints to register against you. One, *John Solomon* didn't come back yet. Is

he coming back soon? And two, you seem to have got two-part stories in abundance, and I hate those. Give me either five or six-part stories, or novelettes.

However, here is some praise. "The Prince of Peril" is the best fantastic story since "The Planet of Peril." "The Man of Gold" is the best adventure story since "Gone North." Now to come back to fantastic stories. "The Radio Gun-Runners" was a "flop," in the complete sense of the word. "The Radio Menace" started off wonderfully, but petered out at the end. The story itself hung together rather loosely. One thing I could not swallow was the changing of the address on the envelope by means of radio waves. Even I, a fantastic story fan who buys eight magazines just because they contain science fiction, cannot take that.

One story I am eagerly waiting for, is "The Snake Mother," sequel to "The Face in the Abyss." Have you any fixed date for the appearance of that story, not just saying that it will appear "some week in October"?

Again I say more and better science fiction.

NATHAN GREENFELD.

A NEWCOMER to the army of readers lets us have a look at his first impressions of ARGOSY:

East Cleveland, Ohio.

I am only a two-weeks' old reader of the ARGOSY, but I'm so enthusiastic over it that I am going to keep it up for a long, long time! I have read the ARGOSY of July 10, 1930, and July 26, 1930, "Argonotes," and so I am in a puzzle when I read about the different stories you refer to such as "Man Size," "The Sapphire House," and so on. No, I'm not going to ask for reprints. I know that the readers of the ARGOSY don't want to read reprints!

I just finished Nicholson's "The Czarina's Pearls." Congratulations! That's a dandy story. More stories by that author. I have just started the first installment of Fred MacIsaac's "The Man of Gold" and think it's swell. Hope the other five parts are as exciting as the first part.

Gardner's "A Year in a Day," of the July 10 issue, was dandy. Ought to have more stories by him also. "Sky Birds," by Thompson, was exciting. "The Crowd Pleaser," by Hill, was the best short story I have ever read. "Moving Day," by Franklin, and Tuttle's "The Trail of Deceit" were no good at all. "Murder! Murder!" by Worts, was not worth a cent.

Jumping lightly from the July 10 issue to the July 26 issue, we find that I liked the story, "The Show-down at Fyffe's," by Elston, is the only good story of "wild and woolly West" that I've cared for. The story by Rich, "The Beast Plants," was excellent. A good impossible

story. I didn't care much for Perry's "Rescued" at all.

"Looking Ahead!" is a very good feature in the magazine. "The Men Who Make The ARGOSY" is very good also.

Tell Fred MacIsaac to keep up the good work in "The Man of Gold." He sure does know how to write. He sure can wrestle with that pen of his!

STRODE H. KERN.

BILL and Jim have found another friend:

Columbus, Ohio.

We are running to the rescue of a man whom we consider about the best writer of stories for your excellent magazine. He is John H. Thompson. His stories are good and funny enough to be rated with the best of humorous writers of all times. What I meant at the first of the letter about rescuing him was this:

I have read "Argonotes" every week since last March and haven't seen much said about John. Come on, readers, let's show how much we enjoy those priceless Bill and Jim stories.

"The Literary Racket" was, we believe, the best of any of this series, but we enjoy them all. As long as John can write such stories his wife and kiddies and the dog need never go hungry.

Thanks, ARGOSY, for giving us his works.

WESLEY S. BIRD.

HERE is an analyzed selection of favorites. "The Face in the Abyss," incidentally, is out of print and unobtainable:

New York City, N. Y.

Fantastic stories, mysteries, Westerns, sport, adventure, war, flying, all are in ARGOSY's repertoire. The following stories I rate best in each class:

Fantastic—"Under the Moon of Mars," by Edgar Rice Burroughs, "The Ship of Ishtar," by A. Merritt.

Mysteries—"The Haunted Yacht Club," by George F. Worts, and "Voodoo'd," by Kenneth Perkins.

Western—"The Bandit of Hell's Bend," by Burroughs, and "Brass Commandments," by Charles Alden Seltzer.

Sport—"The Mental Marvel," by Fred MacIsaac, and "The Lost Punch," by Worts.

Adventure—"The Plumed Serpent," by Richard Barry, and "The Evil Panorama," by Charles Francis Coe.

War—"King's Khaki," by Will McMorro, and "Battle Sight," by Joseph Ivers Lawrence.

Flying—"Death's Domain," by F. V. W. Mason, and "Useless," by the same author.

I forgot to mention historical novels, of which the best two were "Captain Nemesis," by F. V.

W. Mason, and "The Sword of Vengeance" also by Mason.

The best stories of the year so far have been "Gone North," by Charles Alden Seltzer, "Alexander the Red," by Don McGrew, and "The Radio Menace," by Ralph Milne Farley.

Can Merritt's "The Face in the Abyss" be obtained?

DAN VOLAN.

ONE of our younger readers tells us what she thinks of ARGOSY:

Starbuck, Wash.

I have been an almost constant reader of the ARGOSY for four years. I am fourteen. I want to say that the ARGOSY can't be beat. My favorite author is George F. Worts. He sure knows his "Bermudas" when it comes to the *Gillian Hazel-tine* stories. The more of those the better.

Loring Brent, Fred MacIsaac, W. Wirt, Edgar Franklin, Erle Stanley Gardner, are all good. Not to mention John H. Thompson. I certainly enjoy the stories about *Bill* and *Jim*. I read and like all the tales except those about *Mme. Storey* and the Westerns. I detest those. I also like the impossible stories. ARGOSY is certainly a good, old magazine. I should like other girls and boys about my age who read the ARGOSY to write to me.

MARY E. TOMLINSON.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,

280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

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9-20



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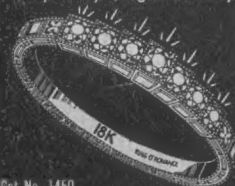
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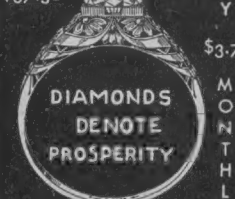
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Gentlemen:

Please send me:
 Diamond Ring O' Romance _____
 And Bulova Watch _____ as featured in your advertisement. Also send beautifully illustrated jewelry catalogue.

Name

Address City

RINGS O' ROMANCE

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IS THIS YOU FIVE YEARS FROM NOW?

When tempted to over-indulge

"Reach for a Lucky instead"



Be moderate—be moderate in all things, even in smoking. Avoid that future shadow* by avoiding over-indulgence, if you would maintain that modern, ever youthful figure. "Reach for a Lucky instead."

Lucky Strike, the finest Cigarette you ever smoked, made of the finest tobacco—The Cream of the Crop—"IT'S TOASTED." **Lucky Strike** has an extra, secret heating process. Everyone knows that heat purifies and so 20,679 physicians say that **Luckies** are less irritating to your throat.

"It's toasted"

Your Throat Protection—against irritation—against cough.

*We do not say smoking **Luckies** reduces flesh. We do say when tempted to over-indulge, "Reach for a **Lucky** instead"